

*PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

IN THE  
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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# *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY



It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

Chapter 1

### ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I have examined the novel, *Pride and Prejudice* in the twenty-first century. As a lecturer of English literature I have found that many students are reluctant to engage with this novel because of their pre-conceived ideas of the novel's trivial storyline and their assumptions about the writer.

In light of this reluctance this thesis explores many of the issues related to *Pride and Prejudice* which both correspond to and reject student's conceptions of the novel. My methodology was to use various sources in order to find perceptions of it throughout its nearly two hundred years of existence. For this I used sources such as Todd's, *Jane Austen in Context*, Copeland and McMaster's, *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* also two volumes of Littlewood's, *Jane Austen Critical Assessments* among others. In the process of this investigation I became aware that from historical responses to this novel we can see a parallel with many readers in the twenty-first century.

In this regard, I consider certain literary theories to define the difference between the story and the plot of novels which also helps to identify the different types of readers. Following this I explore how Jane Austen uses both story and plot in the novel to entertain her readers while also fulfilling her own literary needs.

I then explore many of the literary devices which form a large part of most lectures on this novel. Because there is a discrepancy between the different readers of *Pride and Prejudice* it becomes important for students to understand why this novel is included in their curriculum. This then falls to the literary devices which Austen uses to comment on her own social world. As an aid to this, I would suggest that one can use the films to highlight the

literary devices. Lecturers and students can use visual media as an addition to their engagement with this novel. Viewing the films can reveal why they can never replace the reading of the novels and for this reason students are encouraged to evaluate the films in relation to their reactions to the novel and its felicitous storyline.

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## INTRODUCTION

My reasons for embarking on this essay are varied. Lecturing English literature in the last few years has allowed me to explore my own passion for literature and in turn pass this on to younger minds. But somehow I always hit resistance when it comes to *Pride and Prejudice* and Jane Austen. The phenomenon of *Pride and Prejudice* seems to be waning and many twenty-first century readers and students are opposed to the novel because of its trivial storyline.

I first encountered *Pride and Prejudice* as a young teenager as it was one of the books everyone was expected to read, like *Great Expectations*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. Knowing little to nothing about irony, literary devices or feminism, I enjoyed the book because of the story of Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy and the growing attraction between them. The novel was enjoyed purely on the story level. I later encountered it as part of a first year university course which introduced me to all the elements which make it a literary work studied at university level. And for many years it was filed away in my memory bank as just another part of my literature course.

Many years later I was given the opportunity to lecture English literature to university students where *Pride and Prejudice* was one of the texts. I thought this would be interesting as surely all students would enjoy it as much as I had. To my dismay, I found that many students were averse to this novel because of their preconceived idea of it being just a love story. Much of this prejudice comes from the exposure the novel has had through television and film. The element of surprise has been taken away for twenty-first century students. Rather than fight against the visual media I decided to explore how they can enhance the

learning experience for modern students. Lecturers cannot ignore the technology of today, and our instant gratification students always find the easy way out. Skim through the novel, hire the DVD and pass the exam!

This thesis represents a suggestion to approaching this novel. I will explore some literary theory in order to differentiate between story and plot, an important distinction for this novel. No essay on *Pride and Prejudice* can be without comment of Austen's use of irony, free indirect style or her use of language as a social construct. This leads to an evaluation of the responses this novel has received throughout its lifetime which confirms readers' continuing fascination with it. This brings me to the twenty-first century student and their exposure to the visual media.

I lecture this novel faced with many prejudiced students, both male and female, therefore I needed to explore new ways to engage students with it. This essay represents the result of my research and my understanding of ways to approach *Pride and Prejudice* in the twenty-first century.



## CHAPTER ONE



'If a woman is partial to a man, and does not endeavour to conceal it, he must find it out.'

~Chapter 6

## LITERARY ANALYSIS

Jefferson and Robey describe literary criticism as being, 'concerned with describing, interpreting and evaluating the meaning and effect that literary works have for competent but not necessarily academic readers' (Jefferson & Robey, 1982: 8). Most readers of novels are in a position to evaluate and interpret what they read. As a reflection of this are the many book clubs around the world, where books are explored between groups of individuals who may have had no academic education in literary analysis. They are nevertheless in a position to pass judgement on whether they enjoyed a novel, and what it was about the novel that they enjoyed. David Lodge (Rice & Waugh, 1989: 24) on the subject of literary analysis, asks the question 'Does it enrich our reading by uncovering depths and nuances of meaning we might not otherwise have brought to consciousness, help us to solve problems of interpretation and to correct misreadings?' He will ultimately show that the answer to that question will be yes, although this does not mean a person who is not academically trained will interpret incorrectly or misread a novel. He is saying that literary analysis does help to solve problems of interpretation. In analysing texts in great detail, the literary critic has the tools to uncover the depths and nuances which may be hidden within the novel. A novel such as *Pride and Prejudice* is acclaimed by academics, has an enormous amount of scholarly discourses accompanying it while still being popular to everyday readers. The division between the populist reader and the scholar becomes more blurred when dealing with this novel. The reader who reads for the pleasure of the story does not have to answer the question of what is literary about the text. In an imagined conversation between 'Professor Academicus' and 'Constance Reader', Adam Roberts (in Crusie, 2005: 53) discusses the role

of literary analysis for *Pride and Prejudice*. 'Constance Reader' suggests that 'the thousands upon thousands of articles, the scores of critical monographs published on the subject of Austen — the deconstructions of Austen's novels, the positioning of Austen in Cultural Materialist, Formalist, Feminist, Marxist, New Historicist or other theoretical-philosophical contexts — all this has *nothing to do with Austen*' (54). While Professor Academicus concedes that 'perhaps I, and my profession, do not make enough allowance for the common readers of the world. ...'For too long have I sojourned with specialists and dry-as-dust professors.' (61) Perhaps what Roberts is suggesting is that academics become so absorbed looking for hidden meanings and literary devices within texts, they forget there is a novel with a story which is enough for many readers. The short exchange between the Professor and the populist reader demonstrates the division between many readers of *Pride and Prejudice*. While they are juxtaposed they are divided by the marketing of this 'classic romance'. Readers read and reread this novel, because of the immense pleasure it provides, who have little knowledge of literary analysis. At the same time students and academics continue to explore the seemingly mundane words of domesticity in order to understand Austen's position in relation to her nineteenth century society. In order to understand the position of this novel in the twenty-first century, students need a basic understanding of literary analysis to position *Pride and Prejudice* in the literary world.

## RUSSIAN FORMALISTS

Aristotle identified the concept of plot which he calls 'the arrangement of the incidents' (Selden, 1985: 12). It is not the simple telling of the story which requires our involvement with the text, but rather the telling of the story combined with the delivery of

the events which the writer organises of which the reader takes cognisance. Plot is distinguished from story in literary analysis as that which makes a text literary. Many years after Aristotle's definition of plot came the literary critics Roman Jakobson and Viktor Shklovsky who in 1915/16 concentrated on narratives in order to find what was uniquely literary about them 'what constitutes literature is simply its difference from other orders of facts' (Jefferson & Robey: 27). Their mode of criticism came to be known as Russian Formalism which 'sought to place the study of literature on a scientific basis' (Rice & Waugh: 16). Through their close critical attention to texts they made the distinction between plot or *sjuzet* and story or *fabula* (Selden: 12). The *fabula* refers to all the events narrated in the text while the *sjuzet* reflects the literary structure which the writer imposes on the *fabula* or story. These two concepts are relational. For Shklovsky's purposes a study of the plot of literary works, demanded an exploration of the 'defamiliarisation' (9) of literary texts or that which makes them unfamiliar. Defamiliarisation forces the critical reader to confront what is unfamiliar within a text and therefore deserves our critical attention. In the case of *Pride and Prejudice*, the literary and narrative devices which Austen uses make it untypical. We explore it at various levels to find either the irony behind the comedy or the subversive challenges which lie beneath the innocuous words. If we take it on the *fabula* or story level, it is a simple story of how Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Darcy meet, fall in love and eventually marry. But taken on the *sjuzet* level, Austen confronts this familiar story and manipulates it so that it becomes unfamiliar. On their first meeting Elizabeth and Darcy dislike each other which challenge readers' expectations. A growing fascination occurs between the two protagonists which will finally lead to their marriage. Close critical analysis of *Pride and Prejudice* engages with the devices which Austen uses to confront the familiar and make it unfamiliar. These

devices make this novel a literary work. Justifiably it is called a romance story and to many readers sufficient reason to read this popular novel. However, for many others, there is a desire to explore the novel on a deeper level to find out what makes it literary. The organising hand of Austen not only acquaints the reader with an array of characters but also presents comic and tragic situations within which these characters find themselves. In the next chapter I will establish why *Pride and Prejudice* was seen as nothing more than 'a good book' (Woolf, 1992: 87) during its first years of publication.

## FEMINISM

In analysing literary texts, early feminists would search for the social constructions of gender to explain how women were marginalised either within literary works or as writers of texts. Elaine Showalter contends (in Rice & Waugh: 99) that feminist analysis can be split into two divisions where the first analyses stereotypes, images or gender constructions of women in literature while the second concerns literature which has been produced by women and the conditions under which they wrote. Eagleton states that 'women interested in feminist literature reveal the conflicting positions within feminism itself' (Eagleton, 1986: ix). The growth of a middle class in the eighteenth century saw women being positioned in the private sphere of the home and family while the public sphere of business, politics and industry remained the domain of men. This marginalisation of women limited their access to the public sphere. Those who did venture into this domain were the exception rather than the rule. In their early feminist handbook, Gilbert & Gubar state 'For not only did a nineteenth-century woman writer have to inhabit ancestral mansions (or cottages) owned and built by men, she was also constricted and restricted by the Palaces of Art and Houses of Fiction males writers authored' (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000: xi). The stereotypical representation

of women in eighteenth century fiction is that of the 'angel in the house' (22). This sees female subjectivity within the marital domain. The angel as the perfect, domestic wife whose position in society is to ensure the welfare of her family. In opposition to this was the woman represented as the monster, exemplified by Mrs Rochester, imprisoned after going mad, in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. The insane, first wife is the monster, replaced by Jane Eyre who will end up looking after her blind husband. Early feminist analysis explored these representations to discover 'first, the social position in which nineteenth-century women writers found themselves and, second, the reading that they themselves did' (xi). Later nineteenth-century representation of women would also include the woman as a sexual threat, as in Wilde's interpretation in *Salome*. This 'Amazonian New Woman represented a female sexual autonomy that was sign of radical social change' (Gilbert & Gubar, 1988: 30).

Early examination of Austen's novels focussed on the story (fabula) and later on the plot (sjuzet) which seemed to deal with nothing more than the feminine area of domesticity. With the growth of the novels' popularity, readers became more interested in the person behind the novels. Contrary to the position the New Critics take on literary analysis who 'treat[ed] the literary text as an object essentially independent of its author and its historical context' (Jefferson & Robey: 73) analysis of Jane Austen's novels began to concentrate on the writer and her historical context. Who this writer was who could write so eloquently about such an absurd character as Mr Collins, and yet one whom Henry Austen describes as 'thoroughly religious and devout; fearful of giving offence to God, and incapable of feeling it towards any fellow creature' (Austen, 1818/1987:19).

Exploring *Pride and Prejudice*, feminists examine the conditions and the position of women within the nineteenth century to understand Austen's use of characters. Through an

analysis of *Pride and Prejudice* we understand that Austen does challenge the prescriptive order and constructs a female protagonist who continues the tradition and marries the hero, but only as his equal and only when he can recognise her value as a partner, not just a wife. Writers like Virginia Woolf want to refute Aristotle's claim that 'the female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities' (Selden: 128). After analysing texts by early women writers, we can understand the condition of male dominance which influences their writing and how they adjust their writing to accommodate these conditions. As Showalter contends 'we understand how susceptible women writers have always been to the aesthetic standards and values of the male tradition, and to male approval and validation' (Rice & Waugh: 103); one reason for a female writer to assume a male pseudonym.

Many early female writers believed that a woman could show her literary skill by writing as a man. In other words, a woman could write as well as a man and should not be distinguished because she was a woman. There was no distinction between a male consciousness and a female consciousness, and for this reason many female writers either assumed a male pseudonym or published their books anonymously. Anonymity would allow the pretence of a novel being written by a male writer while a male pseudonym would allow the novel to be taken more seriously because it was written by a man. Readers and critics would assume a more serious subject matter from a male writer than from a female. The dilemma in which the early female writer found herself reveals how novels were positioned within nineteenth century society. Novels written by women were thought to be concerned with frivolous, domestic issues of the private sphere of the home with little of importance to be said within the patriarchal public domain. The general readership of novels would also be women, and so it was assumed that a female writer wrote for a predominately female

readership. The low status of the novel indicates its trivial subject matter, and only read for escapism, while the much more admired poetry and drama were considered too advanced and sophisticated for the female mind. A woman's place in the literary world was the muse who inspires a male writer rather than the progenitor of serious works. For this reason it was important for many female writers to produce literature which could deal with serious issues beyond the domestic realm of marriages and the home. *Middlemarch* and *Jane Eyre* are both serious novels which transcend the domestic world of novels like *Pride and Prejudice*. As Virginia Woolf states, a woman wrote 'admitting that she was 'only a woman', or protesting that she was 'as good as a man' (Woolf: 96), while Charlotte Brontë lamented

I wish you did not think me a woman, I wish all reviewers believed 'Currer Bell' to be a man; they would be more just to him .... I cannot, when I write, think always of myself and what you consider elegant and charming in femininity .... (Rice & Waugh: 109).

Austen's novels were published novels anonymously although they were known to be written by a woman. She announced on the frontispiece of *Sense and Sensibility* that it was a novel written by a lady. Although her novels were published anonymously, it was always understood that the writer of *Pride and Prejudice* was a woman. The distinction which separates the novel from the higher forms of poetry and drama also reveals the only avenue available to a woman writer. In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen reveals her position on the general opinion of novels where the narrator intrudes upon the narration to declare

Yes, novels; — for I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding — joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing the harshest epithets on such works (Austen: 43 - 44).



Many years later, the question would be put to Julia Kristeva on the subject of gender writing (Rice & Waugh: 135) 'Is it [sic] possible to distinguish a language or writing which is specific to women?' to which she replied 'I am very uncertain on this point because what asserts itself today as 'women's writing' distinguishes itself from 'men's writing' mainly by the choice of themes.' The same distinctions would have been present in the nineteenth century and so reviewers would have known that the author of *Pride and Prejudice* was most certainly a woman.

One critic who understood that Austen's writing had more depth than just the shallow love story was Virginia Woolf. It is through her exploration of the obstacles to women's writing that she realised Austen was saying more than was previously understood. Woolf believed in the idea of an androgynous writer, who 'was free to develop both sides of her nature, both male and female, and to create the appropriate kind of novel for the expression of her androgynous vision' (Eagleton, 1991: 25). This androgynous mind was first suggested by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Woolf explored this concept in terms of her own writing and writing by earlier women writers. We credit Woolf with beginning the process of examining female writers in order to understand the conditions under which they wrote and how this influenced their writing and the writing of women who followed them. Woolf explored how patriarchal oppression influences the subject matter of women's writing as well as the production of their work. Woolf's argument was that 'the conditions under which men and women produce literature are materially different and influence the form and content of what they write' (Selden: 134). This mirrors the same concerns which Mary Wollstonecraft examined in 1792. In her treatise, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft wrote that the

neglected education of my fellow-creatures is the grand source of the misery I deplore, and that women, in particular, are rendered weak and wretched by a variety of concurring causes, originating from one hasty conclusion ... a false system of education (Wollstonecraft, 1792: 1).

Her suggestion to overcome this neglect was

the necessity of educating the sexes together, to perfect both ... they should be sent to school to mix with a number of equals, for only by the jostlings of equality can we form a just opinion of ourselves (105).

It would be over one hundred years later when these educational differences became the main focus of Woolf's book, *A Room of One's Own*. In it, she compares the circumstances of William Shakespeare and his imagined sister, Judith. Where William becomes a literary master his sister Judith eventually kills herself because she has been unable to pursue her own artistic dreams. These frustrations and disappointments in life eventually lead to her suicide. Woolf's point here is that should a woman possess the same dreams and genius as Shakespeare, she would not be given the same opportunities given to men. And so that desire to write or perform was denied them because their position in the society was dictated by men. Women are still positioned within the private domestic domain while men control the public. Denied the education which her brothers had, Austen too, explores these same issues, and in *Persuasion* Anne Elliot declares to Captain Harville

"Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands" (Austen, 1818/1998: 206).

Woolf questions why some novels are considered to be worthy enough to read and study while others are not just because of their subject matter 'This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room' (Woolf: 96). Woolf argues that novels like *Pride and*

*Prejudice* are dismissed as trivial escapism while poems from Wordsworth, Shelley or Byron are significant because of their subject matter and the writer's position on the subject matter. This is still a major consideration when we explore *Pride and Prejudice* in the twenty-first century, especially for the student who perceives the novel as nothing more than a sentimental love story. Students studying English literature are sometimes unable to position *Pride and Prejudice* because of its reputation as a romantic love story. The role of the lecturer is to get the student to understand the value of studying *Pride and Prejudice* in spite of its assumed insignificant subject matter.

When we teach *Pride and Prejudice* all these literary traditions are brought to bear on how to approach the text, so that students understand the social circumstances of the characters and the writer in order to appreciate Austen's writing. Students have to go beyond the fabula and examine the *sjuzet* to explore how Austen challenges the novelistic tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. How she was able to write a novel which seems such a slight, domestic comedy, but reveals itself to be far more subversive than was originally thought, is why we use these different literary theories. By exploring *Pride and Prejudice* intertextually scholars can better understand Austen's position on women, especially where they are concerned in the marriage market. The different approaches to criticism enable students to comprehend how this novel has remained so popular for so many years after its first publication.

Like the New Critics, Structuralists also see the text 'as a function of system of literature, divorcing it from historical and social context' (Rice & Waugh: 23). These theorists do not consider the social context of Austen, but rather the language of eighteenth

and nineteenth century England to discover the novel's literary value. However, the historical and social circumstances around Austen in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries does seem to have a direct influence on her writing, especially considering the representation of Austen's female characters. Austen's position as a feminist is lauded by many feminists and yet denied by many others because her protagonists do still marry in order to position themselves in their societies. Where Mary Wollstonecraft wrote her essay condemning the gendered education of the eighteenth century, Austen would write narrative stories which confronted the same issues as Wollstonecraft. And later, Virginia Woolf would again take up the challenge to women's education and continue questioning patriarchal society. In the next chapter on literary devices, I will use the Russian Formalists concept of defamiliarisation to explore some of the issues which reveal themselves in *Pride and Prejudice*, while also arguing why Austen is considered to be revolutionary writer by many writers and critics yet still disparaged by so many others.



## CHAPTER TWO



‘I could easily forgive his pride, if he had not mortified mine.’

~Chapter 5

## LITERARY DEVICES IN *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

One of the main areas for analysis in *Pride and Prejudice* is Austen's use of language and the literary devices which allow the plot (sjuzet) of the story (fabula) to develop. These are elements which are most often missing from film productions. *Pride and Prejudice* is an engaging story with a strong, opinionated heroine which has delighted readers for nearly two hundred years. For academic purposes, the literary devices throughout the novel deserve scholarly attention. The fabula of *Pride and Prejudice* is the love story of Elizabeth and Darcy which seems to be insufficiently academic for many modern students. In presenting the novel to students we can use the visual media to highlight the literary devices in the novel which may be missing from the film. The popular success of the novel lies in Austen's witty treatment of the characters and their situations. For many readers it is not important what issues the writer confronts because the engaging love story is enough to hold their interest. Film makers have made this story into successful productions and as years go by, our fascination with fashions and social mores of previous generations will ensure the continuing success of the films.

This means the novel holds contradictory positions; the popular success of the visual media which reach a wide audience is contradicted by the scholarly studies which look for reasons for the novel's enduring success. This creates a problem for the lecturer who has to show the novel's importance to a prejudiced audience. I use the word prejudice deliberately because the majority of students have been exposed to the film or television versions of *Pride and Prejudice* before they engage with it in their undergraduate course. They assume they are studying a love-story which seems a contradiction in terms. Lecturers have to show how the

scholarly perspective of the novel explores how the language reflects conditions around Austen and what position she takes as a commentator of her nineteenth century society. Although she has been criticised for neglecting the political turmoil which beset England at that time, her 'pictures of domestic life in country villages' (Gilbert & Gubar: 133) are engaging enough to warrant our attention. Until this time literature was written for the literary elite who expected to read about matters of consequence. *Pride and Prejudice* was written between the years 1796-97 which is only forty years after the publication of Samuel Johnson's dictionary. There is a tension between language in the patriarchal public sphere and the domestic private domains of individuals. This novel explores this tension through Elizabeth's and Darcy's dialogues. Austen wrote *Pride and Prejudice* during the continuing war with Napoleon; the onset of the industrial revolution; the subsequent move of people to urban centres in search of work and the concomitant unemployment within these urban centres.

Although these are issues of prime importance for the chronicler of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they seem to be missing from *Pride and Prejudice*. But on close examination, we can see that Austen was aware of these events but chooses to ignore them because 'she had nothing to say about them' (Copeland & McMaster, 1997: 159). The novel focuses on the domestic circumstances of women, and explores matters such as the question of property and how the entail system does not take into account the rights of the individual. These are points which need to be brought to the attention of the literary student, exploring the novel for the first time as an academic text. I will explore these literary devices in order to position Austen as both popular writer and social commentator. An examination of the language within the novel reveals the tension which existed between scientific empiricism



and the romantics' quest for the natural world. The concerns of the age of enlightenment or rationality are evident throughout the novel, and it is Austen's exploration of these concerns, through her characters, which dominate the scholar's interest. The characters represent the tension between the private inner self and the public external self and how this is reflected in the writing style of the novel. As these are qualities which are necessarily missing from the film versions, they are the points which students should engage with to understand the importance of this novel in an undergraduate course.

## IRONY

Jane Austen is acknowledged as one of the great ironists of her age and later ages, and yet many modern students are ill-equipped to uncover much of the irony in *Pride and Prejudice*. Many reviewers of her own age were also unable to recognise her ironic statements which reveals far more about the writer and her age. Emily Auerbach states that, 'Irony allows Austen to expose the discrepancy between what people say and what they mean, what they proscribe for others and what they practice themselves, what they pretend and what they know to be true' (Auerbach, 2004: 57). The pleasure that readers get from Austen's irony is often only achieved on rereading which is a process many readers and students do not often do. They may be able to laugh at how they were misled by the writer but often fail to understand developments like Elizabeth's change of heart after her visit to Pemberley.

In his book, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, (Booth, 1974), Wayne Booth distinguishes four steps in recognising irony. In the first step, the reader acknowledges that the literal meaning of the statement is somehow false or inadequate. There exists something incongruous about the statement which the reader is forced to question. If we examine the famous opening statement 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good



fortune, must be in want of wife' (Austen, 1813/1996: 5) there are a number of points to consider when questioning the validity of this statement. Firstly, is the idea that the 'truth' is 'universally acknowledged', which may be questioned. The reader who approaches this novel for the first time may feel slightly inadequate when reading this as they may not know this 'truth'. This alerts them to the next point of the statement, which states that 'a single man in possession of a good fortune' is looking for a wife. Does this then mean that a single man who is not in possession of good fortune is not looking for a wife, or that a single woman in possession of good fortune is also not looking for a husband, or that single women, not in possession of good fortune, are looking for a man who is in possession of a good fortune? All these possibilities arise, when we examine the literal meaning of the statement which leads to Booth's second step. Here the reader looks for, or is aware of, variant interpretations to further understand the statement. The alternative explanations do not necessarily have to contradict the literal statement, but they call into question the literal meaning. At this point the reader begins to question the attitude of the writer, beginning the third step in the process. In this step the reader has to make 'a decision ... about the author's knowledge or beliefs' (Booth: 11). Booth maintains that the first two steps process do not or cannot tell the reader that the statement is ironic; it is only through the third step that the irony is revealed. With the first two steps the reader cannot judge the author's intentions, which may be a statement they implicitly believe; therefore the statement cannot be ironic. But in the third stage, the reader has to determine if the writer rejects the literal meaning which the reader has understood. When reading *Pride and Prejudice* the reader questions whether Austen really believed that 'a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife'. When we consider that the novel explores the question of property and wealth and how they relate

to the position of women within eighteenth century England, we have to consider Austen's views on her society's treatment of women and property entailment. With this knowledge we come to understand that she does not believe that a single man of good fortune is looking for a wife, but rather single women who are looking for a husband, preferably with a good fortune. In the fourth and final stage of understanding irony, the reader decides on a new meaning to the original statement. If the literal statement is not altogether correct, another alternative must be implied by the writer. Could she possibly be warning us that the novel explores how women have to get married in order to position themselves in the nineteenth century? And considering some of the women we meet in the novel, the five Bennet daughters, Charlotte Lucas, Miss Bingley and Georgiana Darcy, this opening statement is clearly meant to be ironic.

Then we can examine this statement from a different ironic position. *Pride and Prejudice* is a story about five daughters of a gentleman who find themselves in a situation where they need to get married due to the entailment of the family estate. The Longbourn estate will be inherited by the next male in line, which will leave the Bennet daughters with no property and no wealth unless they marry, to men with money. Although they initially seem unconcerned with this state of affairs, its real tragedy is revealed by their vulgar, disagreeable mother whose search for husbands for them becomes altogether comic, tragic and embarrassing for the family. We understand that the intentions of the writer are to explore the position of women through the question of property. However, we can also look at the opening statement of the novel, and relate it to the male characters to whom we are introduced. There is Mr Bingley who buys the Netherfield estate (therefore he has good fortune) and is captivated by Jane Bingley until Mr Darcy's intervention, and who appears to

be searching for someone to share his life (fortune) with. The next single man we meet (other than Mr Darcy) who does little to hide his intentions of looking for a wife (which society expects him to do) is the odious Mr Collins. With Mr Collins, as his first choice is somehow unavailable to him, his attentions are immediately transferred to the next available woman, and so on until Charlotte Lucas accepts his proposal and his conditions for marriage. The opening statement then seems to be correct as these single men are in fact 'in want of a wife'. Austen's use of the ironic statement, meant to reflect the women in the novel, is also a true statement when we consider how the plot develops. Yes the novel is about how women search for suitably wealthy husbands but it is also how men of good fortune search for suitable wives in the marriage market.

In an examination of Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley we can see how the beautiful estate has an effect upon her opinion of Mr Darcy. The subtle irony of the language escapes many students and leads them to possibly mistake Austen's and Elizabeth's intentions. Jane's question to Elizabeth on how long she has loved Mr Darcy, provides an unsatisfactory answer from Elizabeth according to many students. Elizabeth's ironically, flippant comment is 'But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley.' (Austen: 353). Students take this statement literally, and do not understand the irony behind it. This is because they have not considered Booth's first step with the statement. They do not consider this statement to be false or inadequate. While it is true that this is when Elizabeth changes her mind about Mr Darcy, it is not just the large estate which forces the change of mind, but how the estate is a reflection of its owner which enables Elizabeth to change her opinion of him. It is this moment that Elizabeth recognises what she has lost in declining Darcy's first proposal, and it is not just about the wealth and the estate. While waiting for Darcy's

housekeeper, Elizabeth is left to 'wonder at her being where she was' (236). The word, 'wonder' implies both amazement and puzzlement which are both feelings that Elizabeth encounters at that moment. Austen's choice of this word leads to different interpretations of this sentence. We may see Elizabeth questioning how, at that particular moment, she finds herself at the estate of the man she felt such antagonism for. Or we may see Elizabeth, looking around herself with such amazement and incredulity, and imagining her lost chance of being mistress of this estate. Whichever way we choose to read this, the fact that Elizabeth's opinion of Mr Darcy is transformed after she is confronted with his estate and from that moment on the reader awaits the final denouement which must happen. Even though Elizabeth has refused Mr Darcy once, Austen wants the reader to understand that she is the right person to be mistress of Pemberley Estate and so the rest of novel will lead to that conclusion. For Austen, it is about a marriage of equals and Elizabeth and Darcy become just that. Because students have not grasped the irony of this statement, they do not understand that Elizabeth's opinion of Darcy changes because she can appreciate the man where previously she could not. She has grown in maturity and will now make a suitable wife to him. Like our modern students, many of Austen's first readers of the nineteenth century also may not have understood Austen's irony which may have contributed to her reputation as a merely a writer of love stories.

Ironic understatement is used throughout *Pride and Prejudice* and it effectively contradicts the exaggeration which Austen draws our attention to. She uses this device to humorously elaborate on some aspect of a character without actually putting into words the point she wants to make. It is left to the reader to interpret the irony and understand precisely what type of character we have encountered. The obnoxious Mr Collins, and what

he stands for, is revealed through his choice of language which enables the reader immediately to understand his sycophantic behaviour. On first arriving at Longbourn we are told that when questioned, Mr Collins was 'neither in need of encouragement, nor inclined to be silent himself' (63). Without actually saying it, the writer informs us that Mr Collins talks incessantly, which draws the reader's attention to his topic of conversation which is usually about himself or his patroness, Lady Catherine de Bourgh. This device is far more effective than if the narrator had begun a long explanation of the type of person is Mr Collins. The reader interprets the words according to Wayne Booth's steps and comes to the understanding which Austen has intended. In step one, the reader acknowledges that there is something unusual about the statement 'neither in need of encouragement, nor inclined to be silent himself', leading them to consider an alternative explanation to the literal meaning, that he talks endlessly. In this step the reader does not look for an actual alternative, but rather is left considering why the writer has said this, which leads them to question the type of character is Mr Collins. In this situation, it is what Mr Collins represents that Austen is commenting on. He represents the fact that so few options are available to single women, and given his right to choose a wife, the only choice for a woman, like Elizabeth, is the ability to refuse. In the final stage of interpreting the understatement, the reader is left with little doubt of the situation in which the Bennet sisters find themselves. Austen uses the ironic understatement to reveal aspects of a character in both a humorous manner and in a straightforward narrative. After Mr Collins has been introduced to the Bennet family he proceeds to flatter them to the extreme. On being 'set right by Mrs. Bennet, who assured him with some asperity that they were very well able to keep a good cook' (31), he 'continued to apologise for about a quarter of an hour' (31). The exaggeration merely emphasises Mr

Collins's sycophantic behaviour and prevents the reader from taking him seriously. However serious a threat Mr Collins is to Elizabeth, he is understood by the reader to be nothing more than a caricature. Later in the novel we are told how Mr Collins intends to 'throw himself at her [Charlotte Lucas] feet' (119), in his relentless pursuit of a wife. Mr Collins does not literally throw himself at her feet, but he does intend to pursue her as wife. The exaggeration merely emphasises his ridiculousness, and provides another comic moment in the novel. This example typifies Mr Collins's language and reflects how he actually expresses himself. Austen mocks the conventions of the familiar love story, where a suitor will throw himself at his lover's feet, but with real love. Mr Collins is not in love with Charlotte; she is merely the means to an end. He is looking for a wife, and at this point, any woman willing to accept him will do. This forces us to consider what Austen is saying about the position of women, especially women like Elizabeth and Charlotte, where Charlotte's desperation is a point of concern for Austen and the reader. However, Austen has another use for Mr Collins. Because he is a minister the reader would expect her to treat his position with more respect, but Mr Collins represents the position of the church during the seventeenth and eighteenth century when there was a tension between the church and politics. Mr Collins represents 'the church in an age of negligence' (Copeland & McMaster: 153 – 154). At this time, clergymen came from a particular class and did not necessarily need to be spiritual in order to become a minister of the church. We should consider this representation of the church in *Pride and Prejudice* in light of Wickham's strategy to gain a position with Mr Darcy's father as well. Wickham's desire to enter the church is merely a ruse to get money from Darcy's father and from Darcy.

The opening sentence in *Pride and Prejudice* is a relatively easy sentence to understand in terms of its irony; however there are many other comments by the writer which have eluded recognition by many critics especially when the novel was first published. The reception of *Pride and Prejudice* on its initial publication shows that those early readers were unable to recognise either Austen's intentions or the domestic concerns she was challenging. One answer may lie in the fact that she was writing within certain prescriptive rules of the novelistic tradition, and in order for her novel to be a success, she would have been guided by these rules in telling her story. The fact that much of her irony was lost on the first readers is a reflection of her society's sympathies and concerns. Later critics came to understand the irony which enabled them to question the positions Austen takes on a number of issues. It is this same reason that many modern readers miss the irony because they are not able to judge the author's intention, as they are unfamiliar with the social mores of the eighteenth century.

#### **FREE INDIRECT STYLE**

Jane Austen uses the free indirect style of narration to reveal the private thoughts of her central characters. In her public life, Elizabeth Bennet is expected to behave according to the norms of her society, which she does to a certain degree. She is aware of expected behaviour in society, but like her father, she takes a slightly superior position and makes fun of her society's foibles. The nineteenth century is one in which people's intercourse reflects the formal manners of the era. It is only through Elizabeth's behaviour and her private thoughts that the reader determines her real character. The free indirect style allows the reader to access to the heroine's real thoughts and feelings. This style of narration also gives Austen the opportunity to pursue the conviction that women are capable of rational thought. In the age of rationality, where all of mankind is believed to have the capacity to reason,

women are not being included in that generalisation. Women were still being marginalised in the public sphere and are bound to the private, domestic world they inhabit. Under this patriarchal society, a character like Elizabeth breaks the conventional mode of women and their position in society. Austen provides Elizabeth with recourse to rationality and through this Elizabeth is able to confront Mr Darcy, his proposal, and his language, and justify her indignation at his proposal. In using this narrative style, Austen reveals the drama of the situation, particularly its effect on Elizabeth. This is not meant to be taken humorously, and the reader is forced to connect this proposal with that of Mr Collins's. Where his proposal has all the elements of comedy to it, Mr Darcy's lacks any humour which displays the intensity of his emotions. Unlike Mr Collins, Darcy does love Elizabeth but at this stage she cannot accept him on his terms; they both have to respect each other. This narrative style reveals the perturbation of Elizabeth's mind and focuses our attention on the anxiety which she is feeling. In the following quotation, it is not just the narrative style which betrays Elizabeth's agitation, but also the manner of the writing, where punctuation and full sentences fall away to show the tumult of her thoughts

That she should receive an offer of marriage from Mr Darcy! that he should have been in love with her for so many months! so much in love as to wish to marry her in spite of all the objections which had made him prevent his friend's marrying her sister (189).

Without the information supplied in his letter, she is exasperated by his temerity and his rudeness towards herself and her family. The contrast between Elizabeth's private thoughts and her verbal replies to Mr Darcy reveals the tension between appearance and reality, between the inner private world and the public world where formality is so important.



Elizabeth tries to maintain control over herself, even though she has been humiliated by Mr Darcy's treatment of her family

"From the very beginning, from the first moment I may almost say, of my acquaintance with you, your manners impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others" (188).

When we compare these words with the first quotation, we can see that Elizabeth maintains her sense of social codes through her language in her response to Mr Darcy. Although privately agitated her public world is still subject to society's expectations of formality. It is only through the indirect free style narration that her private thoughts and her real feelings are revealed.

The interesting point of Austen's use of the free indirect style (or free indirect discourse as identified by Rimmon-Kenan, 1983: 110), is that it is a narrative device which is eventually used by writers in the modernist period to represent stream of consciousness. As Rimmon-Kenan contends

Because of its capacity to reproduce the idiolect of a character's speech or thought ... within the narrator's reporting language, FID is a convenient vehicle for representing stream of consciousness, mainly for the variety called 'indirect interior monologue' (Rimmon-Kenan: 110).

That Austen is one of the first novelists to use this style of narration so effectively is often overlooked, and is certainly unknown to a number of new students of *Pride and Prejudice*. The ordinary reader may or may not be able to identify that these are Elizabeth's actual thoughts coming via the narrator, but will probably not be able to link this stylistic device to other genres especially those associated with modernist and post-modernist writers. This literary device becomes such an effective tool with later writers that there is a tendency to overlook

that Austen uses it to draw attention to the issue of language within the public and the private self and the tension which exists between appearance and reality.

## LANGUAGE AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

*Pride and Prejudice* was written during a time of great tension between science, religion, politics and the rights of man. The age of rationality and reason is deeply embedded in writers and philosophers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The question of language and understanding and how it is used was being investigated by philosophers such as Locke and Hume. Austen explores the tension between understanding and language throughout *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth Bennet's use of a publicly constructed formal language is not always understood because she is a woman. Although Elizabeth declines Mr Collins's offer of marriage using a language he should understand, he misinterprets her refusal as typically feminine coyness. Charlotte Lucas also uses a public language to alert Mr Collins to her availability to be his wife after Elizabeth's refusal. Mr Collins's language reveals his vested interest in the landed estate. He has to marry in order to continue the male line to keep Longbourn in the family. Most modern students are able to identify Austen's use of both characters and caricatures, but are not always able to connect their roles in the novel with the issues she confronts. All the characters in the novel use the public sphere of language however limited it may be, and even though we are only partial to Elizabeth's private thoughts we can judge the other characters through their public use of language. The question of how to say something unique to oneself, while using a public language is explored by Austen through Elizabeth's reasoning. When we examine the language in *Pride and Prejudice* we understand more about the writer and her concerns with social class, the entail and its affect on an individual.

The silly Mr Collins and his language leave the reader in no doubt about his character and his role in the novel. His first letter to Mr Bennet warns the reader of what a ridiculous person he is, which his language and behaviour confirm. After reading the letter the astute Elizabeth immediately discerns the kind of person he is and questions her father

“There is something very pompous in his stile. — And what can he mean by apologizing for being next in the entail? — We cannot suppose he would help it, if he could. — Can he be a sensible man, sir?” (62)

There is no doubt that Mr Collins is the cause of the Bennet girls' dire situation but only through the entailment system. He is to inherit Longbourn which he allows him to feel 'concerned at being the means of injuring your amiable daughters ... and assure you of my readiness to make them every possible amends' (62). With Elizabeth we are forced to question the extent of his concern, as this is the first olive branch he has extended, just when he needs a wife. What other type of amends he could make other than marriage to one of Mr Bennet's daughters is not even considered. His language reveals him to be a self-obsessed, pompous and obsequious fool, who cannot hear or understand an individual's use of language, particularly the strong, opinionated Elizabeth. He is searching for a woman to be his wife and believes that in turn, every woman would want to be his wife. His role in the novel is to contrast with Mr Darcy. Both characters use a language which Elizabeth rejects. As representatives of patriarchy their language reveals the superior position of men. Both proposals to Elizabeth focus on themselves and what marriage means to them. The idea of a marriage between Elizabeth and Mr Collins is inconceivable because we know the kind of woman Elizabeth is and the kind of man she deserves. Mr Darcy's first proposal is saturated in a language which reveals his pride and until he can accept Elizabeth on her terms, he too

will be rejected. While Mr Collins uses language for his own benefit he is incapable of understanding Elizabeth's language when she declines his proposal as her language does not correspond to Mr Collins's understanding of a woman in her position. He expects her to be grateful and cannot hear her refusal for what it is. His language is about himself and what a marriage (to any woman) means to him 'I think it a right thing for every clergyman ...I am convinced it will add very greatly to my happiness' (103). Throughout his speech, his language is loaded with the pronouns, I, me, and my and only refers to Elizabeth in how she will fit into his world. He is deaf to her speech because he cannot see her response for what it reveals. The more she refuses him the more charming he finds her, as he is unable to see the individual person, but sees her rather in relation to her position in her household and in society. He understands the position the entail has put the Bennet girls in and considers marriage to one of them an act of charity. He thinks that 'This was his plan of amends – of atonement – ... and he thought it an excellent one, full of eligibility and suitableness, and excessively generous and disinterested on his own part' (69). He sees himself as their saviour and shows little concern which daughter he should bestow this honour onto 'Mr Collins had only to change from Jane to Elizabeth – and it was soon done – done while Mrs. Bennet was stirring the fire.' (70). The patriarchal conditions of the nineteenth century demand that a woman marry, especially advantageously such as Mr Collins is offering. He feels any woman will be grateful for his favour. He cannot comprehend Elizabeth's refusal as it transcends his understanding of marriage. Women, like the Bennet daughters, are waiting for someone like him to come along, marry them and rescue them from spinsterhood. Elizabeth, however, is determined not to marry anyone whom she does not love and will not allow her desperate position to detract her from that end, especially with someone like Mr Collins. Mr Collins

will find the wife he is looking for in the pragmatic Charlotte Lucas, who sees the marriage exactly as it is, the 'pleasantest preserve from want' (120). In her language she considers the position which society has placed her in, and sees her position the same way that Mr Collins does. She is able to manipulate the situation that Mr Collins is in after Elizabeth has refused his proposal 'for though feeling almost secure, and with reason, for Charlotte had been tolerably encouraging' (119) and transpires to meet him 'accidentally in the lane' (119). She knows that, at twenty-seven, this chance at marriage may be the only one she is likely to get, and therefore, to be properly positioned in society, she must be married. Charlotte is grateful to Mr Collins and their marriage will be a good one and the language she hears from Mr Collins justifies her manipulations 'But little had she dared to hope that so much love and eloquence awaited her there' (119). Charlotte and Mr Collins are getting what they want and need and fulfilling their roles in society. Mr Collins gets the wife he needs and Charlotte gets the husband she needs. They have performed the roles that society expects of them; therefore their duties have been fulfilled.

In both Mr Collins's and Mr Darcy's proposals to Elizabeth they consider the marriage market only in respect to themselves and neither of them considers Elizabeth and her feelings. Mr Darcy's expectation of Elizabeth's gratitude are immediately dashed and he too is incapable of comprehending her refusal 'In such cases as this, it is, I believe, the established mode to express a sense of obligation for the sentiments avowed, however unequally they may be returned' (186) she retorts at his proposal. She does not act in the way that society, Mr Collins or Mr Darcy expect of her. At the same time, we determine from Mr Darcy's language how hard he finds it to express his private thoughts using a language

prescribed by society. He stumbles over his words and cannot say what he wants to say. The formal use of language is inadequate and his agitated mind is revealed through his behaviour

he came towards her in an agitated manner ... His complexion became pale with anger, and the disturbance of his mind was visible in every feature. He was struggling for the appearance of composure and would not open his lips, till he believed himself to have attained it (186).

The contrast between Darcy's first and second proposal is understood in terms of the language he uses. Mr Darcy is finally able to reveal his real private feelings using a language observed by all lovers 'he expressed himself on the occasion as sensibly and as warmly as a man violently in love can be supposed to do' (346) and is able to acknowledge his admiration to Elizabeth 'I believe, I thought only of *you*' (346). His speech has moved away from the self pronouns and he is able to acknowledge Elizabeth as 'you'. Darcy uses words which have been said before between other lovers and these are the words that Elizabeth understands. Although he is expressing something which is real and unique to himself, he is using a language familiar to all lovers. However, he is only able to do this because Elizabeth has shown him how. He explains why he has been so proud and restrained

"I have been a selfish being all my life, in practice, though not in principle. ...I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. ... to think meanly of all the rest of the world. ... By you, I was properly humbled. ... You shewed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased" (349).

Although we are captivated by Elizabeth and Darcy getting married, we have to acknowledge the radical position which Austen takes toward the nineteenth century class system and the position of women. As Tony Tanner states 'the assertion of the free-choosing self and its resistance to the would-be tyranny of roles imposed on it from socially superior powers is a spectacle which delights us now as much as it can have done Jane Austen's

contemporaries. (Tanner, 1986: 125). That Elizabeth Bennet, a middle class woman, with relatives in trade and industry, is able to marry a noble man such as Mr Darcy on her own terms, would have been quite revolutionary in the early nineteenth century. The popular success story of a girl who makes good is fictional, although for Austen it is something she believes in for future generations. She questions the entail system in relation to the Bennet daughters and explores how this system ignores the rights of the individual, both male and female but in particular, those of women.

One final point about Jane Austen's use of language in *Pride and Prejudice*, and one which students are not always able to recognise is the presentation of time. As noted, Austen explores the question of public and private language and how they differ. *Pride and Prejudice* has three volumes but has two distinct parts to the style of writing. The division between the parts occurs after Mr Darcy's first proposal and his explanatory letter to Elizabeth. With the first section of the novel most of the action occurs through dramatic dialogue. The balls, the walks and the conversations are public and use a language understood by all society. There are rules of manners to which all the characters prescribe. We seldom have access to any character's private thoughts, only those which the omniscient narrator relates. The progress of the novel is advanced through action and dialogues between characters in the public sphere, through the narrator. While the second part of the novel begins after the letter which forces Elizabeth to realise how her own prejudice has led to her bad opinion of Darcy. Tanner suggests that the second half of the novel is 'a mixture of narrative, summary and scene [which] carries the plot towards the conclusion' (121). Elizabeth's maturation begins after reading the letter and realising how her first impressions of Darcy have blinded her to his real self and to Wickham's duplicity 'Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think,

without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd.' (Austen: 201). Most of the action in the second part of the novel occurs through reported speech and through Elizabeth's private thoughts rather than dialogues and actions. In this section we are exposed to Elizabeth's inner language, her real self and not the person who is on public display. Austen exposes the distinction between language used in the public sphere and the private language of an individual. While Elizabeth maintains her control over her language in her public space

"You are mistaken, Mr Darcy, if you suppose that the mode of your declaration affected me in any other way, than as it spared me the concern which I might have felt in refusing you, had you behaved in a more gentleman-like manner" (188).

she berates herself in her inner thoughts for being blinded by her first impressions and her prejudices

How despicably have I acted! ... I, who have prided myself on my discernment! ... and gratified my vanity, in useless or blameable distrust. ...I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment, I never knew myself (201).

In revealing the distinction between private and public language, Austen shows the tension between the internal and external world. Language is a reflection of yourself, and through Elizabeth's language we see her as a 'lively, young woman who thinks, reasons, argues, sparkles, and laughs her way through a series of absurd and unfair social circumstances' (Auerbach: 129).



### CHAPTER THREE



‘I admire all my three sons-in-law highly. Wickham, perhaps, is my favourite; but I think I shall like *your* husband quite as well as Jane’s.’

Chapter 59

## EARLY RESPONSE TO *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

Although Jane Austen had completed *Pride and Prejudice* in 1797, it was only published sixteen years later and four years before her death. As is known, *Pride and Prejudice* was initially called *First Impressions*, which is somewhat ironic in that the first impressions of it are altogether contrary to later criticisms and opinions in the twentieth century. Much of this may be attributed to Henry Austen's Biographical Notice which prefaced the first publications of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, posthumously published together in 1818. The biographical information presented Austen as a kindly spinster sister and aunt, whose modesty and humility contradicted the writer of the novels. Bruce Stovel, (in Copeland & McMaster: 231) identifies four phases of criticism of Austen's work. The first phase from 1811 (following the publication of *Sense and Sensibility*) to 1870, the second from 1870 to 1940, (the beginnings of literary criticism), the third phase from 1940 to around 1970 and the last phase is current criticism. The interesting point about his phase identification, is the academic study of Austen's works really only commences in the third phase. This coincides with Elaine Showalter's contention that

in the early 1920s it was desperately unclear why English was worth studying at all; by the early 1930s it had become a question of why it was worth wasting your time on anything else. English was not only a subject worth studying, but the supremely civilizing pursuit (Showalter, 2003:22)

Scholarly interest in Austen's novels follows the path of general academic study of English literature. It seems with each generation interest in novels which offer us a window on past eras continues to develop. The reason for engaging in the response which has accompanied *Pride and Prejudice* throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is to consider how to

present this novel to the modern undergraduate student. *Pride and Prejudice*'s reputation has gone through stages, and the predominance of the visual media of the twenty-first century means that, for many students, its reputation precedes its position as a literary work.

In order to explain the early nineteenth century response to *Pride and Prejudice* we need to first understand the position which the novel was held in at that time. We know from *Northanger Abbey*, how Austen felt the need to defend the lowly novel. The intrusive narrator states that

Yes, novels; — for I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding — joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing the harshest epithets on such works (Austen: 43).

We need to appreciate why she so vehemently defends her choice of writing. Mary Waldron contends that 'Reviewers had become accustomed to treating the novels which came under their scrutiny with a degree of contempt ... they were on the whole hardly worth serious consideration' (Todd, 2005: 83). An expanding readership showed 'the growth in the eighteenth century of the novel as a form in which the woman novelist addressed herself to women and men, while the poet was 'a man speaking to men' (Littlewood, 1998a: 254). The literary elite are also the socially elite minority who patronise readers of novels.

The tension between the inferiority of the novel against the growing numbers of readers and their demand for more novels is indicative of the tension between the classes of the nineteenth century. The rise of the novel started in the late seventeenth century, and by the time *Pride and Prejudice* was published, there are greater numbers of discerning readers looking for and reading better novels. One reviewer of the period suggests that

The times seem to be past when an apology was requisite from reviewers

for condescending to notice a novel; when they felt themselves bound in dignity to deprecate the suspicion of paying much regard to such trifles, and pleaded the necessity of occasionally stooping to humour the taste of their fair readers (Littlewood: 318).

There does lie an implicit condescension placed on 'fair readers' which is almost the same perception many modern readers and students have of *Pride and Prejudice* of not being serious enough for scholarly attention.

Austen, as part of an emerging middle class, is well aware of her own position as a female novelist. We see with some of the characters in *Pride and Prejudice* that class distinction and where one is positioned within society is an obstacle which they have to overcome. Lady Catherine declares Elizabeth 'a young woman without family, connections, or fortune' and advises her 'not to quit the sphere, in which you have been brought up' (Austen: 337), while Mr Darcy has to contend with 'His sense of her inferiority — of its being a degradation' (185). As Fay Weldon comments 'would Darcy have married Elizabeth anywhere else but in the City of Invention' (Weldon, 1984: 13).

The first notice of *Pride and Prejudice* appeared in February 1813, one month after its publication which states 'It has a very unexceptionable tendency ... The story has no great variety' (Littlewood: 269). The underlying comment here is that, like many other novels, *Pride and Prejudice* deals with trivial matters and is therefore of no great significance. One observation about this notice is the summary of the story, which states

The hero is a young man of large fortune and fashionable manners, whose distinguishing characteristic is personal pride. The heroine, on the first introduction, conceives a most violent prejudice against Darcy (269).

What is important is that the reviewer has begun the summary with the character of Darcy as though he is of central importance to the novel and then follows with an introduction to

Elizabeth. It is not immediately evident that the novel focuses on Elizabeth rather than Darcy. This is an example of the patriarchal roles in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and how they insinuate into the production of literature and the characters' roles in fiction.

What we can take from the reviews is that the commentators' interest lies in the story (fabula) and the organisation of plot (sjuzet), identified by both Aristotle and the Formalists. The anonymous novelist is lauded for providing an enjoyable and entertaining story but no comments about the irony and the issues with which she engages. At this time irony is not understood and so many of the issues Austen confronts are not immediately recognised. These would only become apparent later when critics began to question Austen's writing style.

Many readers see the story as nothing more than one woman's bumpy road to marriage. Austen conforms to the popular novelistic formula in order to encourage readers to her novels. But behind that felicitous, domestic story is a writer whose characterisations have been likened to Shakespeare's by some later critics. The mundane story and the innocuous ending of *Pride and Prejudice* mislead many readers and reviewers of the nineteenth century and subsequent generations. Until then she was praised for being just a good story teller. The distinction is once again drawn between the conventional reader who does not consider the unique writing and the scholarly reader who looks for what is unusual and different in the novel. The same contradiction exists then as today which is why the modern student has to be able to engage with literary devices in order to understand Austen's talent.

In *The Lady Novelists* written (in Littlewood: 337) G.H. Lewes calls Austen 'the greatest artist that has ever written' (337), and states that 'only cultured minds fairly appreciate the exquisite art of Miss Austen' (337); however he does suggest that 'female

literature has reason to be proud of her' (338). In 1859, Lewes suggests that even after fifty years Austen has still not achieved the status and recognition which he felt she deserved. Lewes contends that 'the real secret of Miss Austen's success lies in her having the exquisite and rare gift of dramatic creation of character' (346), and suggests that 'her invention is wholly in character and motive, not in situation' (347). These comments confirm my contention that there was a particular way in which *Pride and Prejudice* was read in the nineteenth century and how that reflects the same reading pattern today. What Lewes does suggest is that Austen is an artist 'worthy of the study of all who desire to understand the art of the novelist' whose place is 'among great artists, but it is not high among them' (354-355).

It seems that many early readers could not distinguish the irony or the subversion in Austen's writing yet they could still commend *Pride and Prejudice* for the entertainment it afforded its readers. In an essay written in 1870, Margaret Oliphant maintains that Austen-Leigh's memoir 'throws a certain light upon her character, which is not the simple character it appears at the first glance, but one full of subtle power, keenness, finesse, and self-restraint' (377). This same observation would be investigated further by Woolf, over fifty years later. Although growing in popularity and readership, the novel is also still being criticised for its insignificance. The war with Napoleon, the large migration of people into the cities in search of work and the concomitant poverty in urban areas do not seem to appear in the novel. *Pride and Prejudice* details nothing more tragic than Lydia's scandalous elopement and Elizabeth's realisation of her prejudices. As Charlotte Brontë was to comment to Lewes thirty years after Austen's death

Why do you like Miss Austen so very much? ... I had not seen *Pride and Prejudice* till I read that sentence of yours, and then I got the book. And

what did I find? An accurate daguerreotyped portrait of a commonplace face; a carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses (427).

Brontë's remarks remind us that although this novel was growing in popularity, it still had its many critics.

What this reveals is the discrepancy between the readers of the nineteenth century. Readers and commentators had not yet understood the subversive elements, or Austen's unique writing style. As both Henry Austen's biographic notice and Austen-Leigh's memoir painted a picture of the writer as a demure sister/aunt, readers could not see further than the essentially feminine story development of the romance between Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Darcy. In the next century, commentators and critics would still be divided on the novel and would become known as the Janeites or the anti-Janeites, (Todd: 94).

## CHAPTER FOUR



“I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state.”



## 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY RESPONSE TO *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

The growth of criticism on *Pride and Prejudice* follows the growth of literary criticism in general. Many students question the importance of this novel in the twenty-first century but judging by the number of articles, books and general criticism attached to it and its writer it still has major significance. While criticism of *Pride and Prejudice* in the nineteenth century concentrated on Austen and the limited confines of her domestic world, the twentieth century would open up criticism to engage with the writer's stand on a number of issues and to position the text in a much broader framework. It is from the twentieth century that the 'systematic study of narrative' (Rice & Waugh: 24) has contributed significantly to our knowledge of narratives. Commentators and critics have debated the significance of *Pride and Prejudice* from different theoretical perspectives; from revolutionist to Marxist, from abolitionist to post-colonialist, from structuralist to post-structuralist, deconstructionist and of course, feminist. One has only to read the titles of essays on Austen to wonder at the amount of criticism connected to this one writer, from 'Jane Austen and the Moralists', 'Jane Austen and Romantic Imprisonment', 'Jane Austen and Education', to 'The absence of God in Jane Austen'. The list seems endless. This is important for the lecturer who has to decide to which of these theoretical perspectives to introduce students.

As previously mentioned (pg42) Stovel identifies four phases of academic study of Jane Austen and her novels. In *Critical Assessments* the stages are divided chronologically from the dates of the novels' first publications in the nineteenth century up to the responses of the twentieth century. In *Jane Austen in Context*, the responses to Austen's novels have been divided into early responses, responses from 1830 – 1970, and recent responses, from 1970

onwards. More criticism and commentary appears in the last century than in the previous one, and even more since the 1970's. This interest has transcended the literary world to be taken up by the visual world of television and film. As Emily Auerbach states 'Paradoxically, Jane Austen nowadays seems everywhere yet still hard to find' (Auerbach: 3). What is evident when exploring the analysis of Austen, is the attribution given to her throughout the different centuries, from 'Miss Austen' to 'Jane' to 'Jane Austen' to 'Austen'.

In 1905, Henry James claimed that 'Jane Austen, with all her light felicity, leaves us hardly more curious of her process ... than the brown thrush who tells his story from the garden bough' (Littlewood: 436). He contends that her success and popularity was reached 'by the stiff breeze of the commercial, in other words of the special bookselling spirit' (436). James associates her success with the rise in popular fiction, and commercial success, which he calls 'the pleasant twaddle of magazines' (436). He argues that commercial selling is responsible for her success, and labels her novels 'a sentimentalized vision' (437). The success of her novel lies in the marketing of it rather than anything literary. Because of its feminine, parlour subject matter James does not consider it to be a literary novel. Like previous critics, James sees little value in her novels other than 'little glimpses of steady vision, little master-strokes of imagination' (437) but with little else to recommend it. This criticism will continue to be levelled against *Pride and Prejudice* by many critics throughout its lifetime. Contradicting this sentiment are the critics who compare Austen to Shakespeare in her characterisation. In 1918, Reginald Farrer describes Austen and Shakespeare as 'our two greatest creators' (Littlewood, 1998b: 178). Prior to this T B Macaulay commented that 'Shakespeare has had neither equal nor second. But among the writers who ... have approached nearest to the manner of the great master, we have no hesitation in placing Jane Austen' (Littlewood, a:

335), while Lewes, reacting to Macaulay's statement, calls her 'a prose Shakespeare' (337). It is considered by many that, like Shakespeare, Austen 'could do characters' (Todd: 96).

*A Memoir of Jane Austen* was published to satisfy the growing numbers of readers wanting to know more about the writer of *Pride and Prejudice*. This biography would establish the ethos of 'Aunt Jane'; the loving, spinster aunt who modestly valued her privacy. This ethos was begun and perpetuated by members of the Austen family which would remain for many years. Establishing the 'Aunt Jane' ethos corrupts any other view of Austen as social commentator. It would be many years before anyone questioned this identification. Even though many critics would admit to despising her subject matter, her popularity continued to grow and with it the growth of criticism of her novels. Unlike the phases of criticism previously mentioned, Trott (in Todd: 92) suggests that criticism of Austen is divided into two distinct forms, where the first results from the 'Aunt Jane' ethos of the memoir, which acknowledges her characterisations and sees her as a social comedian. This criticism connects to the identification of plot and story but not to the literary devices. The second type of criticism opposes this and examines her novels for the position Austen takes and for the social circumstances around at the time of her writing. Criticism is no longer centred on her characters or her comic style, but concentrates on what she is commenting on and how this is achieved. From this point on, her own life is not central other than how eighteenth century attitudes and values affect her writing. As Trott contends 'changes in attitude seem to be marked by a turn from Life to Work, and from woman to writer' (92). B C Southam maintains that 1911 is 'the starting-point for the serious academic approach to Jane Austen' (Southam, 1968: 233), following a lecture given by A C Bradley. This lecture would combine all Austen's novels and letters and how she appears in all these writings. Bradley categorised

her as 'a moralist and a humorist', a moralist because 'her explicit statements and comments are often well worth pondering' (Littlewood: b: 203).

When one compares the number of characters in novels such as *Middlemarch* or *Vanity Fair* with the much smaller number we meet in *Pride and Prejudice* we have a better understanding of Austen's 'little bit of ivory, two inches wide, on which I work with a brush so fine as to produce little effect after much labour' (Auerbach: 5). Although aware of the limited scope of her novels, Austen makes no excuse for her '3 or 4 Families in a Country Village' (Gilbert & Gubar: 107), while using a 'brush so fine' to detail her characters. With our first introduction to Mr Collins, it is understood that he will want Elizabeth to be his wife even though he is not good enough for her; so how she manages to refuse him and escape from his proposal is the detail which engrosses the reader's attention. This detail provides the irony and comment which Austen makes on women's position in the eighteenth century in relation to the marriage market. Readers have already formed their opinions on both Elizabeth's and Mr Collins's characters therefore it is not just for the comedy that Austen introduces this event.

One commentator who has been a major contributor to critical interest in *Pride and Prejudice* in the twentieth century is Virginia Woolf, who positions the woman writer, and especially Austen, in the context of a patriarchal social system. Woolf's exploration of the obstacles to women's education and writing would lead to an improvement in women's education, which would in turn encourage many later women writers. This would eventually lead to the feminist movement and attention given to women writers of previous generations as part of a feminist tradition. This naturally lead to further interest in Jane Austen and *Pride*

and *Prejudice*. In her essays on women and writing, Woolf perceives Austen, just as Austen-Leigh's memoir described her; the quiet, spinster aunt, who valued her privacy, so much that she hid her writing whenever someone came near her 'Jane Austen was glad that a hinge creaked, so that she might hide her manuscript before anyone came in' (Woolf: 87).

However, with more research into Austen, modern opinion argues that she was probably more determined and mercenary than even Austen-Leigh could comprehend. With her father and brothers solidly behind her she could negotiate with publishers and not be discouraged by their lack of interest. Buying back *Northanger Abbey* from the first publisher shows her determination to publish in spite of considered negative opinion. This behaviour contradicts the quiet, humble spinster put forward by both Henry Austen and Austen-Leigh. In a letter to her brother after it became known that she was the author of *Pride and Prejudice* Austen states 'I believe whenever the 3d appears, I shall rather try to make all the Money than all the Mystery I can of it'. She probably hid her work to stop people badgering her while she was writing, rather than for any sense of humility. Like others, Woolf also compares Austen to Shakespeare, but not in their ability to portray characters but as writers, who write 'without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching' (88). Woolf argues that feelings of hate, fear, protest and preaching could (or should) have been in *Pride and Prejudice* because of the conditions under which Austen wrote. Her social circumstances of being a female writer of novels, in a time when novels and women are both marginalised, suggest that these conditions should influence her writing. The implication is that Austen should have written in reaction to these conditions, but, Woolf argues, these are missing from the novels, therefore we cannot know Jane Austen, but she 'pervades every

word that she wrote' (88). Woolf suggests that *Pride and Prejudice* has universal appeal rather than parochial appeal that previous critics identified, because 'Never did any novelist make more use of an impeccable sense of human values' (Littlewood: b: 223). These human values are not just apparent in the narrow confines of provinciality, but are transparent everywhere in the villages, towns and cities. Woolf has begun to penetrate the world of Austen and *Pride and Prejudice* in the 1920s and 1930s which others would continue, and from the second half of the this century would critics really begin to understand the writing of Jane Austen.

The response and critical attention to *Pride and Prejudice* has continued to grow throughout the twentieth century, particularly from 1970 onwards, although many consider R W Chapman's *The Novels of Jane Austen* published in 1923 as the 'authoritative edition of her works' (Copeland & McMaster: 218). Johnson contends that not only is Chapman's work the first major instruction on Jane Austen's novels, it is also 'the first scholarly edition of any English novelist – male or female – ever to appear' (218). From 1970 onwards, critical studies of *Pride and Prejudice* have covered many various topics, that there are now so many books that deal with this novel that it is hard to decide where to begin any critical study. In 1975, in *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, Marilyn Butler positions Jane Austen 'in the mainstream of intellectual ideas following the French Revolution' (Todd: 101). Butler reveals 'Where Austen stands on a number of contemporary issues' (101). Many of the serious issues which Austen was once castigated for ignoring are now noticed in her novels despite former critics' understanding. Part of Butler's caution seems as relevant now as it was in 1975 when she states 'that the Austen novel is not 'only a woman's novel' but is 'among other things a woman's novel' (102). Just when you think nothing else can be said about *Pride and Prejudice*

somebody brings some new aspect to the study of this novel. Since the feminist revolution of the 1960s and 70s much of the literary criticism of *Pride and Prejudice* has been directed at whether or not Jane Austen is a feminist. Bearing in mind that she was writing contemporaneously to Mary Wollstonecraft and her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Austen has been both derided and applauded for her position on the rights of women. Some consider that as Elizabeth Bennet is a strong, opinionated young woman who eventually marries Mr Darcy as his equal and for her own reasons, suggests that Austen is a feminist who anticipates a time of equality between men and women and between the classes, while others believe that *Pride and Prejudice* merely subscribes to the status-quo of the patriarchal system, as her central character does get married, after witnessing the extent of Pemberley estate. The debate continues and with each critic and their analysis, a new approach to *Pride and Prejudice* begins.

## CHAPTER FIVE



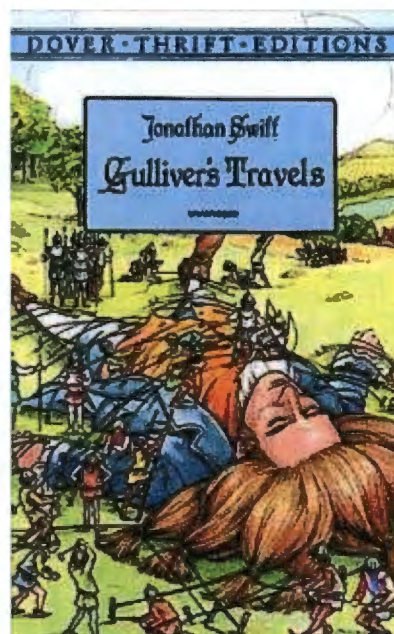
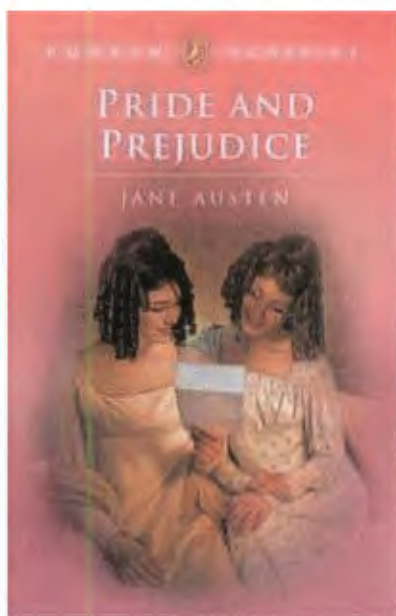
‘For what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbours,  
and laugh at them in our turn?’

~Chapter 57



## *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* AND THE 21ST CENTURY STUDENT

For many readers, *Pride and Prejudice* is 'The Original Chick-Lit Masterpiece' (Crusie: 63), and with modern editions of the novel being released in pretty pastel colours, with the sub-title 'A Classic Romance', it is no wonder that many serious minded students balk at buying this novel. The young undergraduate student who wanders into their local bookstore and finds this novel, with its pretty pastel coloured cover, with a description of being a classic romance novel, compared with a novel such as *Gulliver's Travels*.



I can sympathise with their resentment as it must be difficult to be enthusiastic about a literary work which seems to be directed solely at a female audience. The above cover epitomises the general impression of Jane Austen which has filtered down through the many generations of readers. The impression is that because the novel deals with such light, domesticity, it has little literary value. A comment that seems to sum up many modern, undergraduate literature students' feelings towards *Pride and Prejudice* states 'It is a publishing

truth, universally acknowledged, that anyone professionally involved in the pursuit of 'Literature,' must, by definition, despise chick lit' (71). It is then up to the lecturers to overcome the prejudice directed at this novel and show its scholarly appeal. Without the academic approach to the novel, readers can mis-read the novel and not understand the use of literary devices throughout the novel. There is always the understanding that this novel has enormous appeal even without considering the literary aspects and therefore there are many readers who are able to enjoy the novel without the benefit of academic study. This does not mean that the scholar should ignore the appeal this novel has for so many readers, but should rather acknowledge its continuing fascination.

Every few years a new edition of the novel is released to a new generation of readers and with each new edition the cover in some ways epitomises that era's fashion or their concept of conventions of the nineteenth century. For example, the cover of the 1870 edition of the novel depicts a seated, young girl surrounded by three men wearing different types of outfits or uniforms. In the background are the tents of a military camp. This must represent Lydia, as we know that Elizabeth is never put into this situation, but we can certainly see Lydia on her jaunt to Brighton surrounded by a number of male admirers from Colonel Forster's militia. There is no mystery about to whom this cover appeals. At least there is no sub-title to suggest any romantic sentiment.

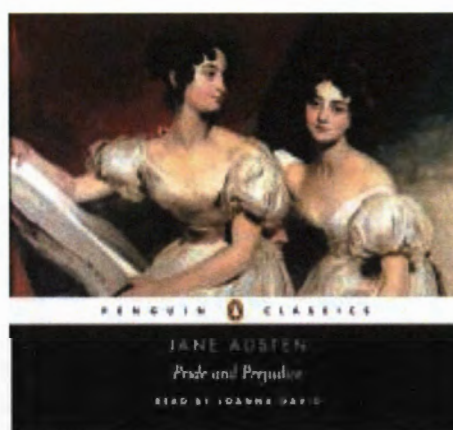


Figure 13. *Pride & Prejudice* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1870)  
spine and front board.

There is still something subtly masculine about the cover rather than the overtly feminine pastel colours of newer editions. The uniformed men may hold some attraction for male readers, but the intention is to show the young girl as the centre of attention, alluding to its feminine subject matter. However, the novel did have its share of both male and female readers in 1870, in spite of its 'parlour' standing. I have already commented on the status of the novel during Austen's life, and by 1870 there would have been an even larger literate populace providing more readers than during the first publication of *Pride and Prejudice*. This edition of *Pride and Prejudice* was released in the same year that Austen-Leigh published A

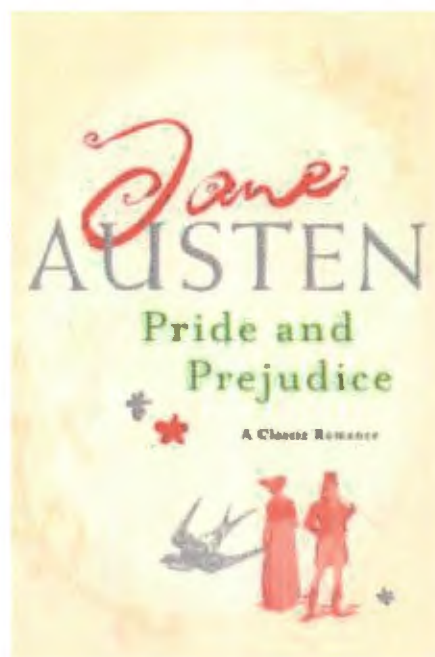
*Memoir of Jane Austen*, which may have helped to contribute to a newer, larger readership which has continued to grow throughout the years.

We have only to look at some of the other editions which have been published throughout the years to see who is being targeted. The front cover of the Penguin Classics edition of 1996 shows a painting by an nineteenth century painter, Sir Thomas Lawrence who was a contemporary of Austen's, thus providing the modern reader with a sense of the nineteenth century's fashion. The impression which this cover gives is that the era within the novel is not modern and is probably the early nineteenth century. Being included in the Penguin Classics collection also informs the potential reader that there will probably be some form of scholarly introduction which will benefit any academic study. So this edition is targeting the scholar of either gender. Both male and female students should have no hesitation in buying this book from the bookstore.



In contrast to the Penguin Classics edition, the edition sold in bookstores today is clearly aimed at the feminine mass market. With its pretty pastel coloured front cover and the sub-title 'A Classic Romance' it is hard to imagine that this novel is considered a serious work of literature. This edition has all the markings of a conventional, love story or chick lit.

One or two young men this year were slightly hesitant about bringing out this novel from their backpacks because of its very feminine cover. It is understandable why some students come to these lectures somewhat prejudiced towards the writer.



Many students begin their undergraduate course unable to position *Pride and Prejudice* in English literature courses because it has the reputation of being just another conventional romance story. Although it has always had this renown, this perception of the novel now seems to override any previous scholarly distinction. *Pride and Prejudice* has survived for nearly two hundred years and is considered a worthy piece of literature, but its subject matter and female protagonist recommend it as a chick lit masterpiece, despite the number of male scholars' investigations. This approbation means that *Pride and Prejudice's* sentimental reputation, which an undergraduate initially has of the novel, precedes their scholarly approach. For many students the idea of studying a love story for a university degree is almost an oxymoron. How one can seriously study a love story becomes a paradox. They question what can possibly be of literary value in a novel which conventional opinion has it as just trivial escapism? Lecturers often have to overcome this obstacle before their students can really engage with the novel. A few students have a slightly patronising attitude, where they see *Pride and Prejudice's* inclusion in their studies as condescending to feminism. It is as though they feel that its only reason for being in their course is that it is an early novel written by a female writer. The earnest, post-modern literature student in 2009 ridicules the sentimental 1800 love story without understanding the writing techniques which Austen uses and the conditions which she confronts in the novel. It is no wonder that many male and female literature students come to this novel with some prejudice. With their prior knowledge of the subject matter their scholarly engagement with the novel may be compromised. They both perceive the *Pride and Prejudice* as the conventional love story, set in Regency England, where a hero and heroine overcome certain obstacles and ultimately end



up getting married. The students question how this can be considered serious literature? For many male students, the idea is even more incongruous. In lecturing a module with the title 'One Writer's Vision – Jane Austen' I have many students, both male and female, who would rather not take this module. Being a compulsory module, they do not have a choice, but if given the choice most of the males and a few females would rather take a course with more variety of writers, instead of just the one author. The following comments from lecturers sum up how many see the problem 'female students greatly outnumber males in my Jane Austen seminars' (Auerbach: 281), while another asks his students if they like *Pride and Prejudice* to find 'that the girls like it and the boys did not' (281). Every year I begin my own lectures of *Pride and Prejudice* with a short questionnaire for students to complete. One question asks what their feelings are towards Jane Austen and *Pride and Prejudice*. I do ask them to be completely honest, but many write something quite oblique as they are unsure how I will react to them being brutally honest, but others are quite strong in their convictions and there ensues a lively debate on why they are being prescribed *Pride and Prejudice*, along with two other Jane Austen novels. The following comments speak volumes:

Garth: Nervous, this kind of reading is not easy for me

Michael: Rumour has it that she is the opposite of interesting

Paul: Suspicious!

while the girls comment:

Stephanie: love her writing

Colleen: I like her stories

Roxy: I love her opinions, it's unique and unlike the norm and her writing is interesting

I do not think I have ever received any truly negative comments, such as Michael's, from a female student. The harshest comment which I have had from a female student states:

Burnice: Neutral; interested in her perspective

Burnice is showing some reserve and appears to be questioning Austen's position or the perspectives of feminists.

In approaching this novel in the twenty-first century, we have to look at presenting it in ways that enable students to engage with the writer's concerns while also appreciating her style of writing. Quite often these two aspects of analysis will go hand in hand so students learn to understand Austen's use of humour which she uses to comment on some aspect of her society's social mores. Many lecturers follow the New Criticism's 'isolation and objectification of the single text' (Rice and Waugh: 16), where they do not take the writer's life into account when lecturing novels and concentrate solely on the text and its literariness. In this respect they would look at Austen's use of irony throughout the novel, as well as the other literary devices already mentioned in Chapter Two. But the conditions which Austen wrote under are important for the student to understand because this novel's inclusion in their studies is not just condescension to feminism. Along with the stylistic achievements of the novel is the fact that she wrote *Pride and Prejudice* at a time when women were still regarded as the inferior sex. Therefore to write a novel with a very mundane domestic storyline which has captured the interest of countless scholars throughout the years deserves our respect. Students do not necessarily need to know everything about Austen's life to understand if and how her life relates to *Pride and Prejudice*, but they do need to understand her position as a social commentator. And, in this respect, they need to be able to position *Pride and Prejudice* in the history of novels. In other words, this novel has to be seen in a



context. In my experience, I have found that unless students are exposed to novels of earlier and later periods, they cannot appreciate the significance of *Pride and Prejudice*. They need to see this novel in relation to novels which have preceded it and to those which followed. The Jane Austen module which I lecture on is given to second year students who have not been exposed to enough literature to warrant a whole module on one writer. Although Austen has been compared to Shakespeare by some critics and commentators, her six novels with their small, country landscapes do not come close to Shakespeare's vast array of characters. There is now such an immense amount of literature to be read, that it seems students lose out by concentrating on just one writer. At second year level it is more important for students to be exposed to a number of writers, their works and different genres to be able to position writers within the literary field.

As an introduction to this novel, it is useful for students to understand the development of the novel as an art form which reflects the society of which the writer is a part. Novels like *Gulliver's Travels* use satire to propel the story where the character of Gulliver meets many different societies throughout his travels. The satire shows aspects of the social mores and conditions of Swift's own society on which he felt compelled to comment 'That great work is obviously concerned to set forth the miserable condition of man, his weakness, pride, and vanity, his unmeasurable desires ... the corruption of his reason' (Landa in Swift, 1976: vii). Later, novels would demonstrate some kind of moral lesson to the reader as a type of instruction. Considering the history of novels enables students to engage with previous eras and the problems they encountered before they begin to explore the extensive works of literature which exist today. Each writer of fiction writes from a certain position, which allows readers to understand the conditions of that generation. Students need to understand

how a novel like *Pride and Prejudice* reacts to what has come before it, and then how it influences later writers.

*Pride and Prejudice* is a story of how two people overcome their prejudices and finally recognise each other as equals. Students tend to forget that there are serious issues which were very relevant at the time Austen wrote and which she confronts in her novel. *Pride and Prejudice* was written in reaction to earlier novels where the heroine was some sort of paragon of virtue. When Austen gives us a character like Elizabeth Bennet, we have to understand this characterisation in relation to what has come before. Elizabeth is not a paragon and Darcy is not a hero. Both of these protagonists go through a period where they question themselves and their attitudes. Austen is not writing about characters with no flaws, but instead gives us protagonists who act and react as real people would do. Elizabeth is justifiably angry at Mr Darcy after his first proposal, and although she manages to control herself, she attacks him for his pride, rather than acting as a meek and simpering young lady. Elizabeth and Mr Darcy learn their lessons and at the end of the novel, come together as better people who can understand and respect each other.

The position of women is paramount in this novel, and one which should be explored by students in order to consider Austen's role as a feminist. Austen uses her novel to show the subordinate position of women in the late eighteenth century and when we consider the Bennet daughters, we understand their dire situation where their family home will be lost to them on their father's death. These young women and many other women of that time had little or no voice in which to express their position, and Jane Austen uses the ridiculous Mrs Bennet to make a condemning comment on the conditions of women living with the entailment system. Although a completely foolish character in the novel, Mrs

Bennet's remarks force readers to question the entail system, male primogeniture and their effects on women in the nineteenth century

‘I can never be thankful, Mr Bennet, for any thing about the entail. How any one could have the conscience to entail away an estate from one's own daughters I cannot understand.’ (Austen: 128).

Presumably this kind of comment in the early nineteenth century would cause Austen's early readers to question the entail system and realise the effects of it on daughters. As a social commentator, Austen presented an amusing story, at the same time considering how social conditions affected many people. She was not a revolutionary who expected mass reform, but rather wrote so that people would begin to consider a system which completely ignores a large percentage of the population. As lecturers' we can use Mrs Bennet's comments to highlight Austen's position on entailment, and considering conditions in rural South Africa, the subject of male primogeniture is still very controversial. It is a practice within many rural areas of South Africa and other parts of the world. Many modern urban students are unaware of the effect these traditions have on certain women. Getting students to read this passage and then come to some conclusion as to why Austen uses Mrs Bennet to make this comment, forces them to negotiate with the text. Students need to consider why it is Mrs Bennet and not Elizabeth who attacks entailment, and then come to some conclusion as to what exactly Jane Austen is doing. They should consider Austen's own critical attitude towards entailment in light of the fact that she uses a character who most often behaves in a foolish and embarrassing manner. Students should understand that much of Mrs Bennet's behaviour is forced on her because she and her daughters will have no home and very little money after Mr Bennet dies and they will be forced to live on the charity extended by

members of their family. Students may find it interesting, that Jane Austen, her sister and her mother were often supported by Austen's brothers after the death of their father. I have found that many students cannot comprehend that these practices existed and what effect they had on women and second sons in a family. Discussions about these issues usually end with male students being more bewildered than females which can lead to discussions about the growth of feminism in the twentieth century. At this point, an introduction to feminist criticism can focus on Austen's position as a forerunner to what would become feminism. I find it interesting that students like to discuss whether they think Austen is a feminist or not. They like to think that Austen challenged the status quo with her strong, independent protagonist of Elizabeth Bennet. But when I question them as to why Austen ended her novel with Elizabeth and Darcy getting married, when she herself did not, they become evasive and remark that maybe she was never asked.

Modern students are unfamiliar with the rules of etiquette of the eighteenth and nineteenth century and often put their own value judgements onto the characters within *Pride and Prejudice*. When Lydia positions herself in front of her sisters 'Ah! Jane, I take your place now, and you must go lower, because I am a married woman' (300) after her marriage to Wickham, often infuriates students. Austen deliberately includes this dialogue because she wants readers to be infuriated with Lydia's behaviour. Lydia has acted foolishly and has threatened the reputation of the whole family, which she seems blissfully unaware of. Instead of acting slightly shamefaced she flaunts her position as the married woman in front of her sisters forcing them into an inferior position behind herself as the married woman. These are the rules of etiquette in the early nineteenth century which sees unmarried women behind and following married women despite their ages and their positions. Society recognises a

woman once she has married and rewards her by her position within a train of women. Our reaction is the same as Elizabeth's who wants to remind Lydia how she came to be married "Thank you for my share of the favour," said Elizabeth; "but I do not particularly like your way of getting husbands." (300). This remark makes no impression on the self-engrossed Lydia. But many students want Elizabeth to be more confrontational towards Lydia, because that is how they would react in the twenty-first century. Even though Elizabeth is a strong woman with very decided opinions, she still conforms to society's expectations in her behaviour. Students have to be reminded that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there were very strict rules of conduct which Lydia takes full advantage of despite the embarrassment and shame her conduct has brought to her family. This commentary on Elizabeth's behaviour will be looked at again in the following chapter.

What Austen is showing us with the characters' behaviour, is how the nineteenth century expects people to behave. Although Elizabeth may seem a strong independent woman, it is still within the confines of her social position as a woman and as a second daughter of an entailed estate. She behaves as she has been conditioned to, even when faced with the prospect of marriage to Mr Collins. Austen does allow her to be strong willed, because she is her father's daughter. Mr Bennet's caustic comments throughout the novel reveal his scorn of society, however once Lydia's behaviour is exposed, he finally makes some effort towards fixing his family. He has favoured Elizabeth and given her a strong will where she has no hesitation in refusing Mr Collins' proposal. Her refusal may not be expected by Mr Collins because of societal conventions, but is expected by the majority of readers, even in the nineteenth century. Although Austen writes humorously, most readers are always

aware of the desperation of the ridiculous Mrs Bennet, to have her daughters married, particularly to men of wealth.



## CHAPTER SIX



‘We treated the story with great respect, but if we wanted to be utterly faithful, we would have got someone to recite it over the radio.’

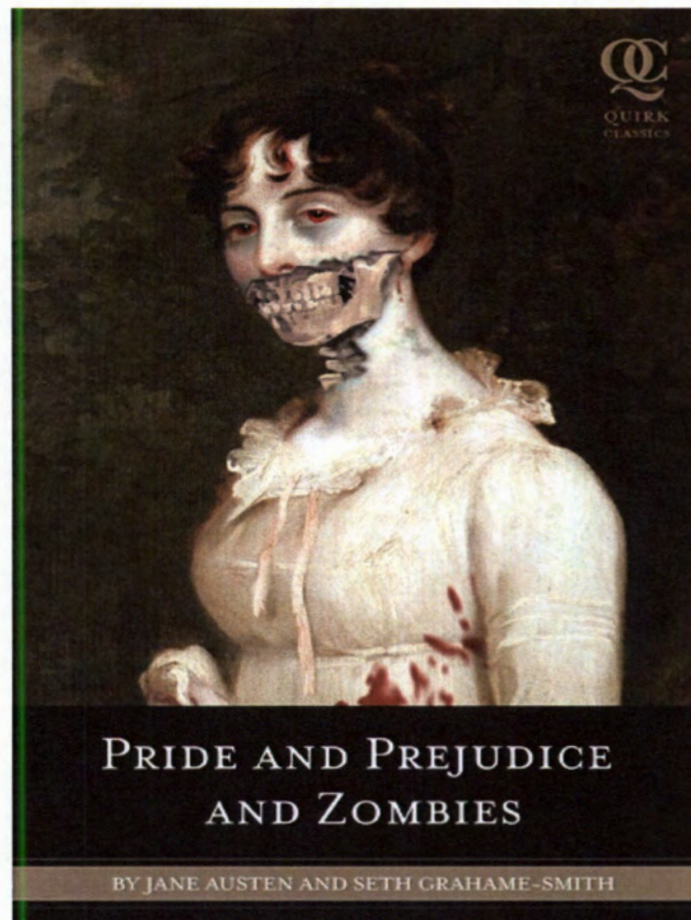
—Director Simon Langton

## FILMS AS AIDS TO LITERARY ANALYSIS

The twentieth century's obsession with the novel of *Pride and Prejudice* has leaked to other media now as well. Over the past years there have been many versions of film makers' interpretations of the novel which tell the story of Elizabeth and Darcy's romance. Despite its enduring and continued popularity or possibly because of its popularity, *Pride and Prejudice* has survived a number of translations, modifications and extensions throughout its lifetime, from the straightforward text, to the adaptations for the visual and audio media. Because of the number of adaptations and continuations its status as a love-story masterpiece for all cultures and generations has established its reputation for all potential students. *Pride and Prejudice*'s ability to transcend its own generation and many different cultures ensures that its popularity will probably continue to grow and with it, the film adaptations as well. The proliferation of Jane Austen visual adaptations has also flourished and since 1995 six adaptations of her novels have appeared, being both stage productions and film or television productions. One reason for this may be that advancements in film technology now enable the era of Regency England to come to life for more people than ever before. With its light and happy story, these films of *Pride and Prejudice* become pure escapism. Cinema-goers escape into the genteel world where the delightful visual reproductions reveal a far simpler existence than our modern, technologically frenetic twenty-first century. Hollywood, Bollywood, television, radio and the theatre, have all had their turn at producing an interpretation of *Pride and Prejudice*. It appears there is an obsession with *Pride and Prejudice* and Jane Austen, which exceeds other period novels such as *Oliver Twist*, *Jane Eyre* or *Huckleberry Finn*. While adaptations like *The Jane Austen Book club*, *Bridget Jones's Diary* and



*Bride and Prejudice*, take Jane Austen's original idea and transform it into something contemporary or new, there remains the basic story. There is even a television series which follows the story of a young twenty-first century girl who unwittingly swops places with Elizabeth Bennet and finds herself back in the nineteenth century world of *Pride and Prejudice*. She meets all the characters she has read about and is initially delighted with this world but then events take place which disrupt the original version and so she then has to orchestrate that incidents occur strictly according to the novel. We will continue to wait expectantly for the Hollywood version of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*.



Our fascination with this novel and this period in history knows no bounds.

However Jane Austen's story or fabula is the basis for these entertaining visual reproductions. As they rely on the visual and audio experiences of viewers they do not have to incorporate into the films the *sjuzet* or what is strictly literary of the text. The limitations of the visual medium mean that elements such as a narrator are easily dispensable. Because of the limited amount of time available in a two or three hour movie not all the elements and characters in the novel can be covered. Films have to concentrate on the two central characters, and only the characters that influence the story line in any significant manner are recognised. Characters like Mr Bingley's married sister Mrs Hurst are considered superfluous as they do not propel the story forwards in any influential way. The BBC's production which runs for over six hours can afford to 'stick[s] to Austen's plot like glue, which perhaps explains why ... it is the best of the all the recent Austen adaptations' (Troost & Greenfield, 1998: 45). Events which occur in the novel may also have to be manipulated differently in the films precisely because there is no narrator. Because they can see the action, cinema viewers can discern whether time has transpired by the simple decision to incorporate a night scene, a change of clothes for the characters or even a different location; they do not need to be told that something has changed in the story. The screenwriter has the task of deciding what can be condensed and what can be left out completely while still following the original story, and 'while Austen takes some 300 to 450 pages to unfold her story, the typical screenplay is only about 100 pages long' (44). The screenwriter's task is not an easy one and how their films expose their own concerns. What will be revealed from the transcripts of some film adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* is how these films reflect the society which produced them. The films are period romances which either delight or disturb cinema goers.

As women have become more assertive in recent years, television and films are following their lead and providing them with the kind of films they want to see which focus on strong, independent woman, whether in the eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth or twenty-first centuries. Jane Austen's story of Elizabeth Bennet and her verbal sparring with Mr Darcy provides the perfect outline for a film or television adaptation. A story which mirrors the independence of modern woman rather than one which displays women's subjection to patriarchal standards of previous generations is sure to have commercial success in our twenty-first century. I will show how the 1940 version of *Pride and Prejudice* reflects the predominantly patriarchal social mores of that time, compared with the 1995 production which is directed at a contemporary audience. What this reveals is that even though the story of *Pride and Prejudice* remains the same, the film and television versions echo the social mores of the society which produces them. Further, what needs to be accepted is that film-makers need to sell their product, so they have to present a story which will be accepted by their consumers; therefore they are given license to manipulate the story in order to sell their product. Examining some of the transcript from the 1940 film version will show how this film reflects the American industry in which it was produced. Although MGM employed the English novelist Aldous Huxley to write the screenplay, it is still an American production of a British novel, produced for an American audience. In this version, it is through Lady Catherine's positive rather than negative intervention that unites Elizabeth and Darcy.

This leads us to the position of this novel in the twenty-first century, and the generation of instant gratification students. The approach used in the lecture room has to recognise that students have probably already been exposed to a visual interpretation of this novel. Lecturers will have to allow for the groans of young students when they 'have' to study

this love-story. The lecturer of *Pride and Prejudice* has to overcome all kinds of opposition and perceptions of the novel before beginning to explore the writer's unique comedy. Even if some student's have not seen any of the recent productions of *Pride and Prejudice*, its reputation as the chick lit masterpiece has cemented their initial approach to the novel.

What effect this exposure has is that many students have seen or heard of the films of *Pride and Prejudice* long before they have even read the novel. And what they have seen or heard affects their engagement with the novel. To put it bluntly, many students are put off reading the novel because of their impressions of what the film or television series is about. And what these media focus on is the sentimental aspects of the novel because they make an enjoyable romance story. However this also means that many of the issues which Austen confronts in her novel are either glossed over or ignored. But, instead of ignoring or maligning the film versions, the lecturer should use them to complement students' engagement with the novel. Where the film versions alter the novel, and concentrate instead on the sentimental story, a lecturer can use that to expose the social commentary which is in the novel. An example is Austen's treatment of Darcy's second proposal in the 1940 and 2005 film scripts. Where Austen leaves out the dialogue to avoid becoming too sentimental, she allows the readers to fill in the serious romanticism

The happiness which this reply produced, was such as he had probably never felt before; and he expressed himself on the occasion as sensibly and as warmly as a man violently in love can be supposed to do. (Austen: 346).

In the 1940 version, events have been altered from Austen's original and Mr Darcy arrives on a fake quest of a message for Jane from Bingley. He and Elizabeth go to the garden in search of Jane and the following dialogue ensues

[Mr Darcy:] I have - but, I assure you I did nothing, Miss Bennet.

[Elizabeth:] Lady Catherine was not of that opinion.

[Mr Darcy:] What? But I never gave her leave to tell you that!

Elizabeth:] Gave her leave?! Do you mean to say that Lady Catherine ...

[Mr Darcy:] I have - wanted to know if I would be welcome. She came as my ambassador.

[Elizabeth:] Your ambassador? I never imagined that that was the language of diplomacy!

[Mr Darcy:] You know, she likes you, in spite of her language.

[Elizabeth:] Me?

[Mr Darcy:] Yes! She really does!

[Elizabeth:] Oh! I wish I had known it! I wouldn't have been so rude.

[Mr Darcy:] But that was what she liked. People flatter her so much she enjoys an occasional change.

[Elizabeth:] I'm afraid I gave her a good change this afternoon.

[Mr Darcy:] She went away delighted! You evidently confirmed the good opinion she'd formed of you at Rosings.

[Elizabeth:] I don't know what to say or think! Except that - you must allow me to thank you for - what you did for Lydia. And, if the facts were known to the rest of my family, I should not merely have my own gratitude to express!

[Mr Darcy:] If you must thank me, let it be for yourself alone. Whatever I did, I thought only of you.

[Elizabeth:] Oh, Mr. Darcy! When I think of how I've misjudged you! The - the horrible things I said...I'm so ashamed!

[Mr Darcy:] Oh, no! It's I who should be ashamed! Of my arrogance! Of my stupid pride! Of all! Except one thing! One thing!  
I'm not ashamed of having loved you! Elizabeth, - dare I ask you again? Elizabeth! Dear, beautiful Lizzie!  
(Scriptorama-2009)

In comparing this to the original we see that not only have the screenwriters adapted the story, but Elizabeth's and Darcy's words to each other have been updated to a modern conversation between two lovers in 1940's America. The 1940 script was originally adapted from a comedy theatre production, so the heightened drama is somehow missing. The comic

features occur in the exchange about the language of diplomacy and Lady Catherine being Darcy's ambassador. According to one reviewer 'Austen's barbs and fangs are removed from this adaptation, making it a romantic sugar gloop like many other films of the period. Still, providing you expect this, enjoy what's on the screen. MGM did this kind of thing better than other studios of the time, after all' (IMDb 2009). This version is meant to be all comedy and was probably very popular seeing as there was a world war which America became part of as Britain's ally. The 2005 script of this scene is even more explicit and leaves nothing for the viewer possibly to misconstrue. There is drama as both Elizabeth and Darcy meet very early in the morning having not been able to sleep. Mr Darcy declares to Elizabeth

[Darcy:] You must know. Surely you must know it was all for you. You are too generous to trifle with me. You spoke with my aunt last night and it has taught me to hope as I'd scarcely allowed myself before. If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me so at once. My affections and wishes have not changed. But one word from you will silence me for ever. If, however, your feelings have changed... I would have to tell you, you have bewitched me, body and soul, and I love... I love... I love you. (Scriptorama).

To which Elizabeth replies

[Elizabeth:] I never wish to be parted from you from this day on. (Scriptorama).

Would Jane Austen ever put this kind of sentimentality into the mouth of proud Mr Darcy?

This film script adaptation is our twenty-first century attitude and would never have been present in Austen's writing but is what the twenty-first century cinema goer expects in a romantic story. In the novel, Austen allows the narrator to inform of Mr Darcy's feelings and glosses over the melodrama because that is not the focus of *Pride and Prejudice*, nor is it how the restrained male of the eighteenth century would behave. Where the film version specifies Elizabeth's reply, Austen leaves this out because we have already anticipated Elizabeth's

response. Austen does not need the melodrama. When students compare how the two film versions have changed the original they should recognise how these changes mirror the societies which produced the films, even though they all deal with an nineteenth century English scene. Presenting these two film versions of the same incident to students can get them thinking of Austen's purpose and the purpose of the screenwriters. Analysing the film scripts against the original can help students to focus on the writing style and techniques which Austen uses throughout *Pride and Prejudice*. Students can examine the film versions and discuss the many reasons for the changes. Not the least is the dramatic effect of the visual medium in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries which has become accustomed to men expressing their emotions, whereas in Austen's time this would not have been characteristic behaviour, especially from a proud estate owner like Mr Darcy. Austen's nineteenth century upper and middle class social world revolved around a degree of restraint throughout all social interactions, one of the reasons why Darcy scorns Elizabeth's mother and sisters.

*Pride and Prejudice* is a story of how two people overcome their prejudices and finally recognise each other as equals, but the film versions conform to our modern romantic notions rather than those of the nineteenth century. They no longer reflect the social commentaries which Austen used her novel for. Students need to be shown that there are serious issues within the novel which were very relevant at the time Austen wrote and which she confronts in her novel. Because the medium of film is visual and there are time constraints, many of the issues which Austen comments on are either disregarded or made light of. Films cannot reproduce the textual elements of the novel, but instead can use dialogue to represent these features. Some students even believe that watching the films or

the television series can take the place of reading the novel. Watching the films cannot take the place of reading the novel, although many students have commented that watching the films and seeing the characters come alive on the screen enables them to better understand the conditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The films can offer an extended experience of the novels and may 'help students visually "connect" with a text' (Troost & Greenfield: 140). The lecturer needs to remind students that many of the issues which Austen confronts cannot be fully understood from the films alone. Lecturers can use the films in association with the novel to highlight many of Austen's positions. By juxtaposing the films with the novel, certain issues within the novel can be highlighted by comparing the same incidents in the films. When we consider the Bennet daughters, their position is hardly considered desperate in the novel until Lydia's disastrous behaviour with Wickham. It is only from the moment Elizabeth learns of Lydia's behaviour that we realise what effect this will have on the family and especially the remaining unwed sisters. Up to this point, Elizabeth has behaved in such a way, that we can believe that her quest for a marriage with love and happiness will be assured. But once Lydia has shamed her family we are forced to consider the position of women in the nineteenth century. That nineteenth century women are marginalised is not realised in any serious manner in the novel, especially considering the Bennet girls and their behaviour. It is only when their position as marketable females is threatened that we realise that marriage in the nineteenth century is really just another economic transaction. Although in the novel Elizabeth Bennet is an 'articulate and independent-minded heroine' (Vivien Jones in *Austen*: xii) she is still a woman of the nineteenth century who is subject to the expectations of her society. She may seem to be so strong and independent but it is still within the confines of her social position. This



behaviour can be reinforced by the films. Because the 1995 television series is spread out over six hours, the screenwriters are able to show this behaviour better than the 2005 film version. In the television series, Elizabeth looks downwards at the ground often, while Keira Knightley's character seldom looks down until she sees Mr Darcy at his estate in Pemberley. Bringing this to the attention of students can involve discussions on why they think the characterisation is so different between the two visual productions. If there is limited time, students can study the 2005 version in tandem with the novel and explore what they think of the characterisation of Elizabeth compared with the novel. It should promote some discussion which can lead to the position of women in the nineteenth century in contrast to their position in the twenty-first century.

Elizabeth always behaves as she has been conditioned to, even when faced with the prospect of marriage to Mr Collins. Her refusal may not be expected by Mr Collins because of societal conventions, but it is expected by most readers, even those in the nineteenth century. The novel was written for nineteenth century women who were already beginning to comment on their positions in their patriarchal society and we can assume that the nineteenth century female reader would relish a story where a woman like Elizabeth can reject a proposal from a man such as Mr Collins. Although Austen writes humorously, students should always be aware of the desperation of the ridiculous Mrs Bennet to have her daughters married. Students can examine the words of Mrs Bennet in both the film scripts and the novel to recognise the drastic position the Bennet daughters and other women are in. In the novel Austen uses the grotesque Mrs Bennet to draw our attention to the conditions of entailment, which is treated slightly differently in the films. Because the 1940

film is an American production, some of the details have to be explained for the audience.

Commenting on the position of their daughters, Mr and Mrs Bennet's dialogue follows

[Mr Bennet:] Mrs. Bennet, for the thousandth time! This estate was entailed when I inherited it. It must, by law, go to a male heir. A male heir, Mrs. Bennet! And, it's possible you remember, we have no son!

[Mrs Bennet:] All the more reason why you should take some responsibility by getting husbands for them! No! You escape into your intelligible books! And leave everything to me! Look at them! Five of them without dowries! What's to become of them?

[Mr Bennet:] Yes, what is to become of the wretched creatures? Perhaps we should have drowned some of them at birth.

[Mrs Bennet:] Mr. Bennet! (Scriptorama).

The entail system may not be so understood in the United States during the period when this film was produced, so it needs to be explained to the audience and what affect it will have on the Bennet daughters. Being a comedy the serious position the daughters are in is immediately alleviated by Mr Bennet's comment about drowning the daughters at birth. In the 2005 film, Mrs Bennet complains to her husband

The way you carry on, you'd think our girls look forward to a grand inheritance. When you die, which may be very soon, they will be left without a roof over their head nor a penny to their name.  
(Scriptorama).

This rather condensed version sums up the desperation and seriousness of Mrs Bennet and students need to see this in relation to the position of women in general. Although the build up to this remark has not really been significant enough to make us question the position which women in the nineteenth century are in, students can consider the different versions after they have read the book and discuss whether or not they think the films have accurately covered the issues which Austen confronts. In the 2005 film, Mrs Bennet has been allowed

to behave in such a manner that some viewers may never take anything she says seriously. She commands no respect from any of her daughters which is really a twenty-first century condition. Throughout the novel, Elizabeth never contradicts her mother even though she is fully aware how her mother and sisters appear at the balls they all attend. This is the expected behaviour of the nineteenth century which is contradicted by the film scripts interpretation of behaviour. Although a completely foolish character in the novel as well, Mrs Bennet makes some remarks which should force students to consider both the entail system and male primogeniture and the effect these have on women in the nineteenth century

“I can never be thankful, Mr Bennet, for any thing about the entail. How any one could have the conscience to entail away an estate from one’s own daughters I cannot understand.” (Austen: 128)

Students should be in a position to highlight Austen’s position on entailment, and considering conditions in rural South Africa, the subject of male primogeniture is still a very controversial one. By focussing on Austen’s wording, students should consider her position as a ‘muted protofeminist’ (Troost & Greenfield: 45). Many of our young students from metropolitan areas are unaware of the effect which primogeniture has, not just on women, but also younger sons ‘A younger son, you know, must be inured to self-denial and dependence’ (Austen: 179). Students should realise that Mrs Bennet’s desperation is a genuine concern for her position and for other mothers of daughters and is an issue which Austen confronts. *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel which should enable students to confront the same issues which Austen confronts. I have found that many students cannot comprehend that these practices existed and what effect they had on women and second sons in a family, or that they still exist within many different cultures. Discussions about these issues can lead to an examination of the reasons for the growth of feminism in the twentieth century and

what affect this has had on the modern student, both male and female. At this point, an introduction to feminist criticism can focus on whether or not students consider Austen to be a feminist or not.

One of the problems associated with the visual adaptations is the presentation of certain characters. Being a very condensed version, certain characters have to be left out, or have their roles altered in order to present information for viewers. This will obviously lead to a change in the characters dialogues. The characters which Austen drew with 'a brush so fine' (Auerbach: 5) were developed to draw readers' attention to specific situations. She uses characters to emphasise characteristics associated with a particular role. The characterisation of Mr Collins as a sycophant does not necessarily suggest that Austen was irreligious. As Henry Austen assured her readers, she 'was thoroughly religious and devout' (Copeland & McMaster: 154). Her treatment of the clergy reflects the general attitude which understood that it was a profession 'not necessarily requiring a special spiritual calling' (154). It suited Austen to use Mr Collins as the foil to Mr Darcy and as the means of getting Elizabeth to Rosings. Characterisation is an important element within *Pride and Prejudice* which students need to appreciate. In comparing the novel's characterisations with the films students should be able to enjoy the interpretations which have evolved. A character, like Charlotte Lucas, who plays such a dramatic role in the novel, despite the grotesque person she marries, is reduced to either a minor role in the films or is presented as ridiculous enough not to warrant our concern. In the 1940 version, Elizabeth hears about Charlotte's engagement to Mr Collins from Mr Lucas and only comments to Charlotte a bit later

[Mrs Bennet:] Oh! There you are, Elizabeth! This is all your fault!

[Elizabeth:] What's my fault, Mama?

[Mrs Bennet:] He says Charlotte is going to marry Mr. Collins! If that isn't your fault, I don't know whose it is!

[Elizabeth:] Charlotte! (Scriptorama)

In the following scene, Elizabeth meets Charlotte

[Elizabeth:] Oh, Charlotte dear, I beg you! Postpone the marriage for a time. I'm only thinking of your happiness.

[Charlotte:] Happiness, Lizzie? In marriage, happiness is just a matter of chance.

[Elizabeth:] But, Charlotte! His defects of character. You know him so little.

[Charlotte:] Well, ignorance is bliss, Lizzie. If one is to spend one's life with a person, it's best to know as little as possible of his defects. After all, one would find them out soon enough. Well, luckily it isn't the end of the world. You must come and visit me, Lizzie. Very soon! Promise?

[Elizabeth:] I promise.

[Charlotte:] Good. (Scriptorama).

In this episode there is no idea of Charlotte's desperation or her circumstances so we cannot look at this dialogue as a representation of the nineteenth century woman's position in relation to marriage. Charlotte's role has been diminished which suggests that she is willing to accept any man as a marriage partner but with no explanation why. Being a comedy, Charlotte is not meant to be taken too seriously and certainly not as representative of the plight of the nineteenth century woman. In the 2005 film our introduction to Charlotte is at the ball, where we first meet her in the novel. However, she has little to say other than to comment on the entrance of Mr Bingley, Mr Darcy and Miss Bingley. We only see her once more until her revelation to Elizabeth on her marriage proposal. Because of the tension which develops in films, the relationship between Charlotte and Mr Collins comes without any forewarning. Like the 1940 version, we are not quite prepared for this development and

so the scriptwriter has to condense Charlotte's speech while still maintaining the drama.

Charlotte reveals her reasons to Elizabeth

[Charlotte:] I've come here to tell you the news. Mr Collins and I are... engaged.

[Elizabeth:] Engaged?

[Charlotte:] Yes.

[Elizabeth:] To be married?

[Charlotte:] What other kind of engaged is there? For heaven's sake, Lizzie, don't look at me like that. I should be as happy with him as any other.

[Elizabeth:] But he's ridiculous.

[Charlotte:] Oh, hush. Not all of us can afford to be romantic. I've been offered a comfortable home and protection. There's a lot to be thankful for. I'm already a burden to my parents. I'm [sic] years old. I've no money and no prospects. And I'm frightened. So don't judge me, Lizzie. Don't you dare judge me. (Scriptorama).

In the novel, Charlotte's position as an unmarried twenty-seven year old woman is pathetic, and we understand her reasons for pursuing Mr Collins after Elizabeth has rejected him. In the film she appears desperate visually where her facial expressions show her concern that Elizabeth understands her reasons for marrying Mr Collins. Using both dialogue and body language to get her message across, we know that Charlotte sees Mr Collins as her last chance for marriage. Through her words she has to explain to Elizabeth why she has accepted Mr Collins' proposal. But the build up to this incident has not happened, therefore the dialogue between the two has been compacted into a short speech to firstly show Charlotte's position and secondly to demonstrate Elizabeth's shock. In the novel Austen forewarns us of the possibility of a marriage between Charlotte and Mr Collins through Charlotte's conniving to meet Mr Collins on his walk. She is subtly ruthless in her decision to marry Mr

Collins, and with good reason. Her explanation has a far more dramatic effect on Elizabeth and on the reader

“I see what you are feeling,” replied Charlotte, — “you must be surprised, very much surprised, — so lately as Mr Collins was wishing to marry you. But when you have had time to think it all over, I hope you will be satisfied with what I have done. I am not romantic you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr Collins’s character, connections and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state.”

Elizabeth quietly answered, “Undoubtedly;” — and after an awkward pause, they returned to the rest of the family. (Austen: 123).

Elizabeth’s response to Charlotte shows her understanding of Charlotte’s position and can accept this marriage for what it is, Charlotte’s last chance to be a wife and an accepted member of society. This may not be how Elizabeth views marriage, but she does recognise Charlotte’s argument. With many men away with the war with France, women are in an even more desperate situation to be married and Mr Collins represents Charlotte’s only chance at respect and a position in society. As a woman Charlotte is supposed to marry and if she cannot, she will have to remain financially dependent on her family with no hope of ever having her own house and position. Mr Collins offers her a chance to be positioned in society which she happily accepts knowing the kind of man she is marrying. This is a good marriage for Charlotte and both she and Mr Collins will have some happiness together. Austen offers a number of marriages in the novel where some are good and some are not. Charlotte and Mr Collins will have a good marriage as each understands their position as husband or wife. Mr Collins was searching for any woman to be his wife, and Charlotte adequately fits the role. Students should understand the position that many nineteenth century women find themselves in with regard to marriage, and the fact that Elizabeth chooses to reject two proposals of marriage is almost idealistic of her. Austen confronts the

marriage market as an economically based contract, and allows Elizabeth to marry a man who will love and respect her in spite of her lowly status 'Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections? To congratulate myself on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?' (188). Compared to the marriages of Mr and Mrs Bennet or Lydia and Wickham, the Collins' marriage will be a good one for both of them. There is a distinction between the happy marriages of Elizabeth and Jane and Charlotte's good marriage. She may not have the same happiness and love as Elizabeth, but she will be content with her situation and her position in society. Although remaining single herself, all of Austen's protagonists marry, as was expected of women in the nineteenth century. Although a spinster herself, Austen understands that readers will expect a protagonist who ends up in a happy marriage. Students can examine the different versions and should recognise the conversation between Charlotte and Elizabeth in the 2005 film reflects the twenty-first century rather than the nineteenth century. While the 1940 adaptation occurs at a time before the feminist revolution and reflects the dominant patriarchal society of 1940 America which assumes all women are looking for husbands.





Poster of the 1940 movie *Pride and Prejudice* (© 1940 Turner Entertainment Co., a Warner Bros. Company, all rights reserved, used by permission)

This production has taken the novel and interpreted it from a 1940 male perspective which is revealed in the advertising for the film. As an explanation, we should remember that this adaptation was taken from a theatre production and it was meant to be just a comedy, so the idea of confronting the subordinate position of women would not have been on the film makers' agenda at all. Students can analyse these versions to comment on how they mirror the society which produces them. This can lead to discussions on how they see the films as representative of society against Austen's original novel and the issues she confronts. When we compare Charlotte in the novel and in the film it is to see whether she accurately communicates the position of women which Austen challenges in the novel. Similarly, students can also compare the characterisation of Mr Bennet and how his qualities are portrayed in the novel and in the films. In the 1995 television series Mr Bennet is seen as a

'charming, slightly absent old man' (Crusie: 99) who seems completely overwhelmed by his family of five daughters and warrants our sympathy rather than our scorn. For many people watching the 2005 film Mr Bennet is portrayed as slightly silly and completely unprepared for the situation which develops with Lydia. Donald Sutherland portrays Mr Bennet as alternately bemused and amused by his family and very seldom interferes with their behaviour. When he does, it is almost apologetically. But in the novel, Mr Bennet's representation as 'general insufficiency — as the lax, irresponsible father who invited disaster by allowing Lydia to follow the soldiers to Brighton' (Copeland & McMaster: 33). In condensing the story, the script of the 2005 film alters the situation in which Lydia goes to Brighton, which does not forewarn the viewer of any impending crisis. Mr Bennet gives his reasons to Elizabeth, for allowing Lydia to accompany the Forsters to Brighton

[Mr Bennet:] Colonel Forster is a sensible man. He will keep her out of any real mischief. And she's too poor to be an object of prey to anyone.

[Elizabeth:] It's dangerous.

[Mr Bennet:] I am certain the officers will find women better worth their while. Let us hope, in fact, that her stay in Brighton will teach her her own insignificance. At any rate, she can hardly grow any worse. If she does, we'd be obliged to lock her up for the rest of her life.  
(Scriptorama)

This conversation does not appear in the novel, and once again represents a conversation between a father and daughter in the twentieth century, rather than in the eighteenth. It does show that Mr Bennet invites disaster by ignoring what Elizabeth is obviously able to discern about her sister's behaviour. Mr Bennet of the film is disturbed by the events which occur, with no real sense of the disaster which befalls the whole Bennet family. This is an important point, as even the representation of Elizabeth's behaviour on receiving Jane's letter

is not dramatic enough. We can see that she is upset and crying, but it becomes slightly comic, as she appears and disappears with Mr Darcy acting like a jack in the box every time she appears. It is as though the effect of Lydia's behaviour has not the sense of doom in the twenty-first century as it did in the eighteenth, so perhaps the screenwriters decide to add a comic element to this scene. Students can examine how this scene has been represented in the film and compare it to the drama in the writing of the novel and decide whether they think the significance of the event has been diminished or not. They can examine these two different approaches to Lydia's elopement to explore how the scandal will unleash on the Bennet family, and what this incident reflects upon women in general. By comparing Austen's writing with the script they can determine whether the drama is effectively established in the film and if not, why they think this is so. Students can also use this event to characterise Mr Bennet, as Austen portrays him rather than his portrayal in the film. The approach taken in the film is heedless of the consequences Lydia's actions have for the rest of her family, whereas in the novel, we know how this situation will disgrace all the Bennets

Elizabeth soon observed, and instantly understood it. Her power was sinking; every thing *must* sink under such a proof of family weakness, such an assurance of the deepest disgrace. ... Lydia – the humiliation, the misery, she was bringing on them all, soon swallowed up every private care (Austen: 264).

Readers of the novel want to blame Mr Bennet for not being stronger and more determined towards Lydia, whereas in the film all the blame seems to fall on Lydia.

What I hoped to have shown in this chapter is that rather than ignore the films and television adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* the lecturer can use them to explore aspects of the novel which should be brought to student's attention instead. Where students have previously had to examine the text like the New Critics, looking for the devices which make

it literary, they can now compare the text with the film scripts and comment on where and why the differences occur. It may enhance their appreciation of the novel, to see how opinions and behaviour have altered throughout the years of the novel's existence, and yet there remains a complex fascination with it. In being able to see the novel they have a better concept of conditions within the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Commenting on the film of *Sense and Sensibility*, one lecturer believes that 'students who viewed the movie comprehended plot developments better than those who had only read the novel' (Troost & Greenfield: 141). The 2005 film of *Pride and Prejudice* is still recent enough for students to have been exposed to it either on the big screen, DVD or on television. This cannot be ignored, so we should accommodate this and use the films to bring the novel to life. Whether students think it an accurate representation is always a personal choice but to ignore it completely would be prejudicial, and of all novels lectured on this is the last one we should be accused of being prejudiced about.

I will end this essay with a personal triumph. I had a male student leave one of the lectures after we had finished our series on *Pride and Prejudice* with a comment that he had a new respect for Jane Austen now as a novelist, and if he had to read more of her novels in the next few years he would not be so anti her, although he did not think he would actually read any more of her novels by choice. A fair comment and at least he gave Austen some credit as a novelist. If this is the kind of reaction a student gives, then something has been achieved.

## CONCLUSION

This essay has briefly explored the novel *Pride and Prejudice* in the context of the twenty-first century. The particular focus has been aimed at students of the novel. As many students engage with this novel for the first time in their university course, it is important to position the novel in the context of their literature degree.

In the first chapter of this essay I examined the difference between story and plot and why this is so important for this particular novel. As so many readers engage with it through its story, it is vital that students understand their exploration of the plot. I then briefly examined feminism especially in relation to this novel in order to reveal Jane Austen's position on women's education. I realise that many students are unfamiliar with feminist literary theory therefore I would suggest that it is a critical component in evaluating this novel. In the chapters on the response to *Pride and Prejudice* I revealed how many commentators misunderstood the plot of the novel and Austen's position on a number of issues.

I suggest that approaching this novel in the twenty-first century requires a different approach from previous centuries. For many students the Aunt Jane ethos prevails and whereas that may have been an inducement for readers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it is no longer an enticement for our modern students. Students are more readily drawn to the idea of a rebellious, subaltern woman whose subversive writing remained misunderstood throughout her own generation. We can explore the novel as we have always done in the past, but now we can allow Jane Austen to escape her kindly, spinster mantle and

be acknowledged as a strong woman writing in a patriarchal world. The films can be used to confirm how patriarchal perceptions have changed throughout the years.



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